ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

“An Army of Lovers: Eros as Attachment in Writing of the American Sexual Revolution”

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This dissertation argues that Eros as an intimate force of attachment plays a crucial role in the development of alternative social and political forms during the American sexual revolution. Sixties counter-cultural novelists and radical theorists employ a politicized discourse of Eros to imagine new forms of belonging apart from the oppressive social and political constraints of postwar America. Novelists such as Henry Miller, Aldous Huxley, Thomas Pynchon, James Baldwin and Toni Cade Bambara craft “erotic communities” in their texts, while political theorists such as Herbert Marcuse, Norman O. Brown, Hannah Arendt and Audre Lorde articulate them in their theories. Erotic communities emerge as social entities out of the relational contradictions of postwar America and are defined by the social constraints of intimate attachment. While most critics have viewed sexuality in postwar America through the lens of the complete liberation of pleasure from repression, I argue that many American writers are interested in developing alternative social constraints to Eros, not eliminating social constraints completely. They articulate these constraints through the discourse of sexual intimacy as attachment, imagining and developing social models based on interdependence, reciprocity and democratic engagement, elements they see lacking in postwar social structures. This dissertation concludes that alternative relational and social forms in postwar America emerge through intimate connection, and it aims to provide a critical
method to better understand and interpret them in postwar American literature and culture.
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Introduction

“For that which should guide human beings who are going to live fairly throughout their lives can be implanted by neither blood ties, nor honors, nor wealth, nor anything else as beautifully as by love.”
- Phaedrus, Plato’s Symposium

“My voice rings down through thousands of years
To coil around your body and give you strength,
You who have wept in direct sunlight,
Who have hungered in invisible chains,
Tremble to the cadence of my legacy:
An army of lovers shall not fail.”
- “Sappho’s Reply,” Rita Mae Brown

“It was a moment of extreme sexual experimentation. Group sex, homosexuality, casual sex hookups were all tried as we attempted to break out of the repression of the past into the revolutionary future. As with so much in my life, I needed a theory rationalizing what we were doing. I argued publicly that since sex was the ultimate intimacy in human relations, we were building collectives bonded with this intimacy among all members, not just between monogamous couples. I remember one ride from Chicago to Detroit in which all fourteen or so of us, writhing naked on the floor of the van while hurtling down the interstate—legs, arms, genitals, interlocked with no particular identity attached. A strange, truly disconnected feeling.”
- Mark Rudd, member of the Weather Underground

Although sex was extensively liberated from social and political regulation during the sixties, the political valence of sex in the period is not limited to liberation. Eros can imply disconnection from the social world but also connection or something else entirely different. In Rudd’s recollection of his years with the radical leftist group the Weather Underground, sexual experimentation freed from traditional constraints is viewed as a political project—a necessary, perhaps even the necessary component of a revolutionary

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1 This recollection is taken from the documentary film The Weather Underground (2002). A slightly revised and expanded version in Rudd’s memoir, Underground (2009), explains that “our sexuality ideology proved to be disastrous. Smashing monogamy drove many good people out of the collective...Instead of bonding people into a true collective, what we were doing created fragmentation and alienation” (165). In Rudd’s recollection, few of the Weather collective “ever looked back on the sexual experimentation with nostalgia” (166).
future. And yet for Rudd, this political project easily slips into mere hedonism or youthful explorations; sex’s political meaning becomes reduced to either politically naïve liberation or a socially meaningless act of personal self-fulfillment. At the same time, the Weather Underground understands the power of sex to bind the collective beyond traditional sexual couplings (depending on your view of the Weather Underground, this may seem either creepy or clever). But for Rudd, this connection of bodies is experienced as a strange disconnection. The bodies on the van floor flow together as individual identities submerge to group identity. Eros destroys old attachments and creates new ones with alternative constraints; it both disconnects and connects, disorients and organizes.\(^2\)

Much has been written about sex as disconnection and disorientation in the sixties and it remains a potent metaphor of liberation from a repressive social world. This dissertation argues that just as important, and largely ignored, is the way sex became the idiom for understanding alternative forms of social attachments, what I term erotic communities.

However, it is this binary understanding of Eros as either social connection or antisocial disconnection, what has been famously critiqued as the “repressive hypothesis” by Michel Foucault, that American writers and theorists during the sexual revolution find limiting. Rather than laboring under the repressive hypothesis, these writers and theorists attempt to escape its narrowing of the social and political relevance of desire to simply a release from oppression. As such, they conceive of Eros as a fundamentally productive social force, not as an oppositional, antisocial force of liberation. As demonstrated above, these two understandings of Eros as a force of connection and as a force of disconnection

\(^2\) I have capitalized Eros in keeping with the Platonic, Freudian and Marcusean traditions. While much of these traditions see Eros as either a divine or biological force, I am committed to tracking its development and morphology as a historical concept—not an essence—through the dissertation.
often exist simultaneously during the sexual revolution in America. However this
dissertation argues that the primary political relevance of Eros for American writers and
theorists is as a force of attachment. Eros provides these writers a language to describe,
critique, and offer alternatives to postwar society. Sexuality is more than an antisocial
force of liberation from “The System,” the sixties understanding of the integrated social
totality of the nation-state, economy, family, culture, etc.; it is a way of articulating new
forms of social belonging and political solidarity.

Social and political theory was eroticized in the sexual revolution and the counter-
cultural and New Left movements of the sixties. The sexual revolution provided
unheralded opportunities for new types of erotic relationships and social forms among
many in America. Although these opportunities were not equally distributed, the
possibility of an erotic organization to society animated radical and liberal sixties writers
and theorists. The concept of Eros as a form of attachment, from Plato’s “army of lovers”
to Freud’s libidinal understanding of Eros as “making one out of more than one” found
new relevance in a rapidly changing social world where old attachments of family,
religion, class, race, gender and nation gave way to a world increasingly characterized by
individual difference and atomization. As such, Eros provided a way to critique the
domination and exploitation in traditional social forms as it also became a way to imagine
alternative forms of social belonging and political structure. Novelists like Henry Miller,
Aldous Huxley, Thomas Pynchon, James Baldwin and Toni Cade Bambara explored the
opportunities for imagining social forms based on nothing else but erotic attachment.
These writers often engaged with American theorists like Herbert Marcuse, Alan Watts,
Norman O. Brown, Hannah Arendt, Kate Millet and Audre Lorde. In this discourse
around sex and politics, this group of writers crafted theoretical and literary models of
erotic communities–social forms bonded and ruled by the logic of Eros.

**New Sexways**

In one of the first popular books on the sexual revolution *The Erotic Revolution* (1965), journalist Lawrence Lipton argues that the sexual revolution is not merely a revolt against the moral code but for millions in America a “thoroughgoing change in the whole sexual economy” (9). Lipton believes this change in sexual economy will have widespread effects on the social organization of American society. Such changes will occur in the emergence of new “lifeways” and “sexways” fostered by changing morality, atomization caused by economic changes, the commodification of sex, and new sexual science. These new “sexways” point to new social forms distinct from those based on the norms of heterosexual monogamy, the nuclear family and mass society. Lipton describes these as “Little cells or enclaves of dissent and experimentation appearing in the womb of the body politic” that will eventually “force their way into being” (13). These new sexways open up a new basis for structuring social experience. Yet they are not wholly oppositional; they emerge out of the “womb” of the body politic. Promoting an “affirmative view of the new morality,” Lipton argues for a study of “contemporary sexways” to determine how changes in sexual behavior change not only the lives of their participants but the very ordering of social experience. These new sexways and the opportunities they present for the re-imagining of social experience is the subject of this dissertation.
The historical and rhetorical contexts for this dissertation are “the sexual revolution” and “the sixties.” Both of these terms are highly contested in terms of coherence and periodization. Furthermore, while the two are historical connected through the counter-culture and New Left, the sexual revolution is not reducible to the sixties (and vice-versa). That said, the politicization of sex and the eroticization of politics were crucial aspects of the sixties. Though the periodization of “the sixties” is generally understood as c.1958-1974, in this dissertation I extend this timeframe to encapsulate the longer history of the sexual revolution. Though earlier writers like Sigmund Freud, Wilhelm Reich and Henry Miller are crucial for the postwar sexual revolution, my periodization begins in 1955 with the publication of Herbert Marcuse’s *Eros and Civilization* and extends to the publication of Toni Cade Bambara’s *The Salt Eaters* in 1980. This periodization allows me to track the multiple revisions of erotic communities from the mostly male and white writers in the late 1950s to the feminist revision of sexual revolution in the 1970s.

The term “sexual revolution,” to describe the postwar cultural changes in sexual attitudes and behavior was likely popularized by a 1964 *Time* cover story, “The Second Sexual Revolution.” The article compares the changing nature of sex in the late 1950s and early 1960s with the earlier shift in mores in the 1920s (the “first sexual revolution”).

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3 For the problem of periodizing the sixties, see Frederic Jameson, “Periodizing the 60s” and Arthur Marwick’s introduction to *The Sixties*.
4 Most historians argue that the sexual revolution begins earlier than the 1960s. Historians Jeffrey Escoffier and David Allyn begin their histories in the late 1950s, but acknowledge the influence of the 1948 and 1953 Kinsey Reports. Other historians like John D’Emilio and Elizabeth Freeman link the “sexual revolution” to a longer period of “sexual liberalism” beginning in the 1920s. Sociologist Alan Petigny calls into question this periodization arguing that statistics on non-marital sex activity show substantial change in sexual behavior as early as the 1940s. Further complicating this periodization, sexual historians like George Chauncey in *Gay New York* has demonstrated early periods of sexual freedom from 1890-1940 followed by an increasing period of conservatism and policing of homosexuality in the 1940s-1960s.
The *Time* cover story collapses several trends in its definition of the “sexual revolution” including the rise of youth culture, cultural permissiveness, anti-censorship legal challenges, declining puritanism, the birth control pill, and the newfound respectability of sex research from Alfred Kinsey and Reich. This popular and still widespread understanding of “the sexual revolution” describes the large-scale changes in sexual attitudes and behavior. While “revolutionary” changes in individual sexways are reflected in many aspects of postwar American culture, this understanding of “revolution” is more akin to a growing liberalism of sex. Cultural historian David Allyn argues for an understanding of two distinct aspects of the sexual revolution— as a contesting of the political status quo (as in the French Revolution) and as a period of social transformation of sex (as in the Industrial Revolution). *Time*’s article and our popular understanding often conflate these two trends, which should be distinguished from each other. John D’Emilio and Estelle Freeman distinguish sexual revolution from “sexual liberalism,” what we might think of as sexual liberation. They define sexual liberalism as:

...an overlapping set of beliefs that detached sexual activity from the instrumental goal of procreation, affirmed heterosexual pleasure as a value in itself, defined sexual satisfaction as a critical component of personal happiness and successful marriage, and weakened the connections between sexual expression and marriage by providing youth with room for some experimentation as preparation for adult status. (241)

While conservative forces worried about the effects of these on American society and culture, sexual liberalism did not present many existential challenges to the political status quo of postwar America. As later theorists like Marcuse and Millet argued and writers like Baldwin and Pynchon express in their novels, sexual liberalism/liberation from traditional constraints was coextensive with the consumerism, rational atomization,
and the patriarchal and raced aspects of American society. Thus, we should distinguish between sexual revolution and sexual liberation. As I employ the terms in this dissertation, sexual revolution is the belief that radical changes in sex are a necessary or central aspect of political change. Sexual revolution assumes that desire is central to all social forms and changes in sexways are crucial political tools and goals for revolutionary change. On the other hand, “sexual liberation” describes the liberation of sex for its own sake—a general cultural permissiveness and de-regulation of sexual desires and practices as a personal or civil right. Sexual liberalism then provides little challenge and may even support the status quo; sexual revolution sees the erotic as a central category of political critique and engagement.

The confusion of these two trends has obscured the complexity of the political uses of sex in American theory and literature. Particularly following Foucault’s critique of “the repressive hypothesis,” the idea that by saying “yes” to sex one says “no” to power, prominent theorists like Marcuse, Brown and Reich have been largely ignored in queer theory and literary studies. Yet, even these theorists most associated with the “repressive hypothesis” have a much more complex understanding of the political relevance of sexuality than the liberation narrative. The widespread liberation narratives of the sixties and the debates over the political legacy of the sixties more generally have obscured the literary and theoretical portrayals that were interested in dismantling the repressive hypothesis, not in supporting it. The writers in my dissertation are quite

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6 Paul Rutherford provides a historical account of the sexual revolution through the advertising and commercial uses of eroticism including the role of psychoanalysis in mid-century advertising.
7 The most recent debates in literature about the mixed legacy of cultural politics in the sixties can be seen in the conversations between Sean McCann and Michael Szalay, who argue that the cultural politics inherited from the sixties are ineffective in postmodernity, and John McClure, who has a more sympathetic reading of cultural politics in the sixties and postmodern literature.
critical of sex as supposed liberation from social constraints. Not only did they think that such liberation was naïve, but most had a distaste for sex as simply antisocial pleasure. Early sexual revolutionary writers wrote against what sexual-mystic theorist Gerald Heard called “trivial eroticism” and Baldwin criticized casual sex as “the dull callisthenic called love—with no love in it” (Blues 105).\(^8\) To view sex as liberation for these writers is to limit its political relevance to a mere escape from social norms which easily becomes nothing more than individual hedonism justified by rhetorics of political liberation.

Sex always takes place within a social world and for writers of the sexual revolution, determining the function of desire within the social world is paramount. In their view, erotic desire is central to all social forms from the fascist to the anarchic. This understanding of Eros’ constitutive function in all social formation is a result of the inheritance of ideas from Freud and is expressed in Freudian Leftism, a dominant discourse of sexual revolution which attempted to synthesize the psychology of desire in Freud and the analysis of social forms in Marx. In Civilization and its Discontents (1930), a foundational text for mid-century Freudian Leftism, Freud claims that the same logic of repression governs both within civilization and within the psyche. This conceptual model explicitly links social logic to sexual logic and throughout the twentieth century is the dominant way of understanding desire’s centrality to social formation.\(^9\) In the Freudian conception, the social world is composed of erotic bonds which are instinctually polymorphous and aim-inhibited, but pressed into the service of creating attachment. Civilization represses not Eros itself, but it regulates Eros as a way to both bind society

\(^8\) I do not share Heard’s and Baldwin’s dismissal of promiscuity and casual sex. Indeed, as several queer critics like David Halperin, Michael Warner, Lauren Berlant and Leo Bersani have demonstrated, promiscuity has been a central aspect of queer belonging and community building.

\(^9\) For the mass popularization of Freudian ideas in America, see Rutherford. For the importance of Freudian Left ideas in the sixties, see Paul A. Robinson’s The Freudian Left.
together and promote reproduction. As such, it privileges certain forms of belonging and certain sexual acts over others through repression. The Freudian Left built on this understanding to historicize Freud’s universal model of civilizational development and to imagine other social forms with more free and egalitarian constraints on Eros. However the Freudian Left was by no means the only way of understanding the social function and possibilities of Eros (Baldwin, Pynchon and Lorde provide alternative models of Eros). For those for whom Freud’s paradigm was crucial, it is important to realize that these writers did subscribe to what Marcuse called Freud’s “fatal dialectic of civilization,” whereby Eros’ relationship to the social world is always defined in terms of the hydraulic metaphor of repression/liberation. However they believe that every social system has some set of constraints on Eros which could be modified, shifted and reworked through the opening up of new sexways and the articulation of alternative sets of constraints.

Reworking Freud’s concept, Eros becomes understood as a fundamental organizational mechanism for social and political units. Even The System, the predominant New Left and counter-cultural understanding of postwar social life, organizes desire in particular ways. This System, best described by Marcuse’s idea of the “one-dimensional society,” saw the social world as totalizing in its reach. One-dimensional society not only integrates social, political and cultural life but also relations between people through its rationalized means. Allowing no alternatives, one-dimensional society privileges a single way of life, a single “sexway” for everyone. As such, one-dimensional society atomizes individuals and estranges them from each other, denuding the types of solidarity and class consciousness which might threaten one-dimensional society. At the same time, it also sublimates Eros into the socially useful
activities of labor. In the Freudian Left framework, restrictions of sexual freedom are not so much “repressed” by society as regulated for certain aims over others. Even non-Freudian models of Eros articulated by Pynchon, Baldwin and Bambara understand the social constraints on sex to shore up social orders built on domination and exploitation. These writers are interested in alternative configurations of social constraints on sex that can imagine new social forms that harmonize individual autonomy and social belonging.

We can think of this group of writers as participating in a counter-cultural project. As sixties historian Arthur Marwick argues, there was not a unified “counter-culture” against a “mainstream culture”; rather, we should think of multiple and varied “counter-cultural” projects as occurring in the sixties (11). The term counter-culture is now often understood as a singular oppositional culture, but when it was first introduced in a 1968 Nation article by counter-culture theorist Theodore Roszak, the term takes on a different valence. Roszak defines the counter-culture as an effort to discover “new types of community, new family patterns, new sexual mores, new kinds of livelihood, new aesthetic forms, new personal identities” (qtd. in Marwick 11). The counter-culture is not a coherent oppositional force, but rather a collection of emerging new structures of thought (patterns, kinds, mores, forms). It was not a unified opposition to The System but a search for ways of thinking differently about social life amidst an increasingly totalizing and conforming social system. In their search for new structures of thought, the counter-cultural writers in my study move outside the dualisms that characterize the repressive hypothesis/liberation narrative. In doing so, they find in the concept of Eros more complex ways of understanding relations outside of binary forms (individual/civilization, irrational/rational, black/white, female/male, etc.) that create the
domination and exploitation they wish to escape. They focus on Eros as a mechanism of open-ended attachment and a mode for non-exploitative social formations.

The theoretical fusion of Eros and political structure has a relatively long but also conceptually short history in the West. While this dissertation tracks the multiple understandings of Eros, the most prominent notions of Eros are from the Platonic and Freudian traditions, each of which experience a renaissance of sorts in the sexual revolution. The Platonic ideal of “an army of lovers” became a popular slogan in the sixties (along with “make love, not war”), particularly during post-Stonewall gay and lesbian liberation movements. The idea originates in Phaedrus’ speech in The Symposium, where he imagines a city or army composed of “lovers” and “beloveds.” Since both the lover and the beloved are shamed by the other, and each other’s shame is the worst shame for them to bear, neither would do shameful things. For Phaedrus Eros becomes a kind of mutual restraint: “for they would abstain from all that is shameful, and be filled with love of honor before one another” (8). The love of the lover and the beloved for each other regulates their behavior and also regulates the social structure itself. In this aspect, this city or army composed of lovers is self-regulating through its own horizontal ties of mutual restraint and affection. There is no need for authority or repression because “there is no better way for them to manage their city” than through the bonds of love between them (8). The concept promises a solidarity among members and a

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10 The slogan “make love, not war” first appeared on buttons sold by the Sexual Freedom League during demonstrations at UC Berkeley and Stanford in 1965 (Allyn 50). There is no reliable evidence on the emergence of the slogan “An Army of Lovers Cannot Fail.” The line appears in Gravity’s Rainbow in 1973, a year before Rita Mae Brown’s poem. The slogan later became prominent in the Queer Nation manifesto as “an army of lovers cannot lose.” See J.H. Lesher for a longer history of the concept in the West.

11 Phaedrus’ conception of love is one of the many in the dialogue and one of the least privileged. For a queer reading of the Symposium, see Halperin, “Why is Diotima a Woman?” in One Hundred Years of Homosexuality.
self-awareness of the group through the relations created through attachment (as well as through the disciplinary mechanisms of mutual shame). That is, the army of lovers model of erotic communities sees potential for communal attachment in the relationship between lovers who regulate their world among themselves.\textsuperscript{12} This understanding of political solidarity in the notion of the “army” of lovers is also a way of understanding polities.\textsuperscript{13}

Such a utopian understanding of self-regulating erotic societies is reflected in activist groups like the Sexual Freedom League and in Miller’s and Huxley’s erotic utopias.\textsuperscript{14} However, this utopian understanding also recapitulates the before/after narrative of the repressive hypothesis. As Lipton points out, new sexways themselves do not emerge from utopian envisioning; they emerge from within existing relational and social frameworks. And as D’Emilio has argued in his foundational essay, “Capitalism and Gay Identity,” changes in capitalism allowed gay and lesbian communities to emerge in the postwar era by allowing individuals to make their living through wage labor and apart from the family. Lipton and D’Emilio demonstrate the potential emergence of new relational forms exist as a contradiction within the relational logics of capitalism. Capitalism exploits relational norms like the family and the workplace, but it also creates

\textsuperscript{12} My use of “erotic community” is distinct from Lauren Berlant’s term “intimate public” or “affective community.” Whereby affective communities are mediated by emotional identification among strangers that promises (but does not always deliver) an experience of belonging, erotic communities are characterized by their emergence through erotic experience (Berlant \textit{Female} viii). In this way, they are based less on identification than on interpersonal connection. The utopian hope of an erotic community is that its internal network of connection is self-regulating.

\textsuperscript{13} The sexual system of Ancient Greece was of course much different from the sexual systems of the 1960s as Halperin has demonstrated in \textit{One Hundred Years of Homosexuality}. The modern re-appropriation of the concept of an “army of lovers” does not seek to recapitulate the patriarchal and pederastic sexual structure of Ancient Greece but to apply it as a way to define possible emergent sexual systems in the sixties.

\textsuperscript{14} The Sexual Freedom League, one of the first sexual rights organization, was founded in 1963 in New York, but was more widely active in Northern California beginning in 1964. For a history of the Sexual Freedom League, see Jefferson Poland and Sam Sloan, ed., \textit{Sex Marchers}. 
relationships and emergent social forms that it does not intend to create. At the same time, these new relational frameworks necessitate new thinking about the social outside of the traditional modernist and materialist dialectics of class-based oppositions. Capitalism cannot help but create “queer” modes of relationality because of its inability to completely regulate every relationship, despite its totalizing aims. We don’t need to subscribe to the strict economic materialism of D’Emilio to see how new sexways and communities emerge; as most historians of the sexual revolution have noted, economic changes are a contributing factor to changes in sexual behavior but by no means the only ones (and not only for gays and lesbians). Nevertheless, sexual revolutionary writers are keenly interested in the contradictions and possibilities inherent in their respective historical moments. As such, they view Eros as providing a plurality of alternative social logics, not a singular oppositional one. These alternatives emerge out of and alongside The System.

While the Platonic ideal of an army of lovers held powerful rhetorical sway, the concept of Eros most employed are those based on Freudian Eros. The Freudian Eros is primarily a mode of social attachment and not explicitly sexual. For Freud, genital sexuality is a severe limitation on Eros, a drive which expands beyond sex to encompass multiple registers of interpersonal connection. This expansion of Eros is also reflected in the non-Freudian versions of Eros from Baldwin and Lorde. In the Freudian conception, Eros is the “life instinct” whose purpose is “making one out of more than one” (65). For Marcuse, Eros is a universal force of attachment, “producing and preserving ever greater units to the sexual drives, this striving is at work in every process that preserves life, from the first union of the germ cells to the formation of cultural communities: society and
nation” (“Freedom” 19). During the sexual revolution, Eros is best described as a force of social binding and attachment that can take multiple different forms. It can take multiple forms because Eros is both “aim-inhibited”–it is dispersed throughout the social world, but it does not seek to create any particular social form–and it is polymorphously perverse–it reaches out to multiple objects and persons. We can see this understanding in from Carl Wittman’s 1970 “Gay Manifesto”:

I like of think of good sex in terms of playing the violin: with both people on one level seeing the other body as an object capable of creating beauty when they play it well; and on a second level the players communicating through their mutual production and appreciation of beauty. As in good music, you get totally into it - and coming back out of that state of consciousness is like finishing a work of art or coming back from an episode of an acid or mescaline trip. And to press the analogy further: the variety of music is infinite and varied, depending on the capabilities of the players, both as subjects and as objects. Solos, duets, quartets (symphonies, even, if you happen to dig Romantic music!) are possible. The variations in gender, response, and bodies are like different instruments. And perhaps what we have called sexual ‘orientation’ probably just means that we have not yet learned to turn on to the total range of musical expression. (2)

Wittman here expands sex beyond the solo or the duet to multiple forms not limited by gender or orientation. As such, he moves to a language of musical expression which has logic (it is not the free-for all of an orgy) but an almost infinite variety of possible configurations (symphonies, even!). Music, like Eros, provides a sense of harmony between individual and social form based on “mutual production.” In this way, Eros provides a logic of relationality that is simultaneously discernible and undetermined and that can articulate new sexways and social logic. Eros is more than just an affective or libidinal drive; during the sexual revolution it becomes a powerful metaphor for political imagination.
**Goodish Foucaultian Subjects**

As I argue in this dissertation, sex in the sexual revolution and the sixties can be characterized as more than the “repressive hypothesis,” although it rarely has been.\(^\text{15}\) Nevertheless, I am in broad agreement with Foucault’s critique of the repressive hypothesis in *History of Sexuality* which has had enormous impact on sexuality studies by shifting our focus to the multiple ways that power disciplines and produces sexuality. I do not take issue with Foucault’s theoretical critique of the repressive hypothesis. However, I do take issue with Foucault’s supposed dismissal of sexual revolutionary and Freudian Left writing as offering no more than the repressive hypothesis. This dismissal has been too ingrained in critical consciousness and has obscured the centrality of Eros in articulating new social visions during the mid-century. Not only does this leave us with an understudied and mischaracterized sexual revolution, but it prevents us seeing how the concept of a politicized Eros can be useful in our present moment for understanding new sexways and social forms. Why then have we misread this body of work?

Much of the reason has to do with the centrality of Herbert Marcuse to the counter-culture and sexual revolutionary thought. In post-60s queer and literary criticism, Marcuse is the queer ancestor we would often rather just forget, although attempts to repress him have not been entirely successful. Despite the fact of his periodical emergence, when Marcuse does appear in recent queer theoretical work, writers often feel the need to qualify that his work has been critiqued by Foucault (often the adverb used is

\(^{15}\) When the sixties are understood as a literary period in literary criticism, the criticism often reinforces this view. Literary criticism on mid-century literature such as Kathryn Hume’s *American Dream, American Nightmare* and Morris Dickstein’s *Leopards in the Temple* often privilege writers’ critique and transgression of social forms. Dickstein’s *Gates of Eden*, however, privileges the utopian elements of counter-cultural literature, but focuses heavily on liberation and Romantic narratives.
In Jose Esteban Muñoz’s case, as he tells it, he was asked by an early reader of *Cruising Utopia*, “how I could turn to a text such as Marcuse’s *Eros and Civilization* after Michel Foucault famously critiqued the work in *History of Sexuality, Volume 1*” (15). Actually, Muñoz (or his reader) is mistaken here; *History of Sexuality* does not cite or engage any work by Marcuse.17 While Foucault effectively critiques the repressive hypothesis, he does not provide much a critique of Marcuse, who in any case is not easily reducible to the repressive hypothesis. Muñoz’s slight is characteristic of the widespread claim that Marcuse’s concepts have been superseded by Foucault. As we see here, the repetition of such rhetorical gestures dissuades intellectual engagement with anything resembling Marcuse.18 As Muñoz himself points out, despite the frequent caveats about Marcuse’s supposed liberationist and utopian rhetoric, we need to revisit writers like Marcuse so that we can see “different paths to queerness.” But first we should ask how this particular path to queerness has been overshadowed by the critical consensus on Foucault’s “famous critique.”

As Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick observes in her posthumously published *Weather in Proust*, “By now there seems to be a near-ineradicable Foucaultian common sense structuring the routines of work in the fields of cultural studies, literature, history and

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16 There are some exceptions to this trend. In queer theory, Marcuse has gained new relevance in recent work by José Esteban Muñoz, Laura Kipnis and Kevin Floyd. In literary studies, Marianne DeKoven and Molly Hite have attempted to demonstrate Marcuse’s importance to sixties literature. For a history of Marcuse’s decline in the academy, see W. Mark Cobb’s “Diatribes and Distortions: Marcuse’s Academic Reception.”

17 In *History of Sexuality*, Foucault once refers to the “great Refusal,” but mischaracterizes it as a “singular locus” of revolt, which conflates a Reichian understanding or repression with a Marcusean one (95-96). W. Mark Cobb makes a compelling case that Foucault’s critique of the “great Refusal” either relies on a confusion of Marcuse’s position or it is a straw argument (180).

18 I am aware of the irony of my own rhetorical position here. Though I am justifying my own engagement with Marcuse, I wish to challenge the point that one always must *justify* Marcuse’s relevance for understanding sexuality and power in the twentieth century, particularly when the “famous” critique by Foucault turns out to be based on limited evidence.
others” (134). While I follow Sedgwick’s desire to remain a “goodish Foucaultian subject,” this common sense has been produced through some of the foundational works of queer theory (including, Sedgwick admits, her own). By 1993’s Fear of a Queer Planet, we can see that a Foucaultian critical consensus has already been established. Making the case for a new analytical framework of queer social theory, Michael Warner’s introduction presents queer theory as the logical the outgrowth of dominant trends in twentieth century thought, as a “convergence point for many of the most important intellectual movements of our time” (viii). Warner cites an “illustrative history” of intellectual ancestors who have made the conceptual link between sexuality and politics, from the more distant radical psychoanalysts (Freud, Reich) and members of the Frankfurt School (Marcuse) to the more recent gay liberationists and second wave feminists. Unsurprisingly, Foucault plays a special role in this history with his “reinvigorating transformation” of the field; History of Sexuality has already become the “inescapable” text in this new convergence. Similarly, Andrew Parker, in his contribution to the volume, “Unthinking Sex: Marx, Engels, and the Scene of Writing,” signals that Foucault’s History of Sexuality has ruptured an intellectual genealogy in departing from the repressive hypothesis:

19 Even worse for Sedgwick the very repetition of this model, she notes in Weather in Proust may reinforce it: “The structure of this kind of conceptual impasse or short circuit is all too familiar: where it is possible to recognize the mechanism of a problem, but trying to remedy it, or even in fact articulate it, simply adds propulsive energy to that very mechanism” (134). “Just don’t say repression” reveals its own structuring paradox of prohibition.

20 Among others Warner lists include French social theorists like Bataille to Deleuze, liberal reformers and social theorists, and anthropologists like Malinowski. Warner, perhaps because of his interest in social theory, occasionally engages with Frankfurt school colleague Adorno and in Trouble with Normal and claims that “liberation theorists” like Marcuse “remain underappreciated” (11). In a 1991 essay, “Walden’s Erotic Economy” Warner provides a thorough reading of Marcuse’s thought as a way to interpret Thoreau. However, at the same time, Warner questions now Marcuse provides a normalizing view of Eros.
When Marxist theories have concerned themselves directly with sexual issues, they’ve needed to relate the story (impossible to repeat after Foucault), of how a natural or potentially liberatory sexuality has been set upon, repressed, commodified, as if sexuality were not always already institutional, existing only in its historically sedimented forms and discourses. (second, my emphasis 21)

Here Parker conflates Marxism with the reductive dualism of the repressive hypothesis which can only see within binary logics of power; this way of thinking is clearly outdated, but it is all Marxism has to offer. From our contemporary vantage point, Warner’s and Parker’s assertions are pointed rhetorical gestures signaling queer theory’s debt to the overcoming of the repressive hypothesis’s dualism, a relic of Marxism and the sixties with which queer theory hopes to quickly dispense.

Yet History of Sexuality itself is often ambivalent on whether its critique of the repressive hypothesis marks an intellectual development or an intellectual rupture.

Foucault, like Warner in his introduction, is conscious that he is responding to and within a preexisting discourse of sexuality’s relationship to power. In laying out his case against the repressive hypothesis, he concedes:

Thus between the two world wars there was formed, around [Wilhelm] Reich, the historico-political critique of sexual repression. The importance of this critique and its impact on reality were substantial. But the very possibility of its success was tied to the fact that it always unfolded within the deployment of sexuality, and not outside or against it. (131)

Foucault’s choice to signal out Reich alone is telling. By the time of the French publication of History of Sexuality in 1976 (1978 in America), Reich’s work and his eccentric public persona had already been publicly discredited in America by a 1947 New

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21 Parker’s essay begins with a search for a “sex-inflected analysis of class formation” to ask to what extent is Marx’s theory of class related to his conceptions of desire? The Freudian-Left tradition takes a different perspective: to what extent is social formation coextensive with desire? That is, how are they linked and determinative of each other at a more fundamental level?
Republic article “The Strange Case of Wilhelm Reich.” This article lead to an FDA investigation of Reich’s methods, particularly his sale of “orgone energy accumulator” boxes. His refusal to capitulate to the FDA forced him into prison in 1957 where he died soon after. While Reich had a renewed popularity among many in the counter-culture and sexual freedom movements in the late 1960s and early 1970s, particularly among writers such as Allen Ginsberg and William S. Burroughs and groups such as the Sexual Freedom League, they were based on theories developed in the 1920s-30s, as Foucault notes. By 1973 Reich’s orgone boxes had already been parodied as the epitome of naïve hippie sexual liberation, the “Orgasmatron” in Woody Allen’s sci-fi parody Sleeper.

However, after the successful French publication of Marcuse’s One Dimensional Man in 1968 (America, 1965) and Eros and Civilization in 1971 (America, 1955), Reich’s work was republished in the country between 1970 and 1974 and became popular among Leftists and sexual liberation groups in France and throughout Europe (Eribon 43). Foucault’s signaling out Reich alone as his intellectual foil in History of Sexuality is more likely a political gesture directed to the French Left and sexual liberation activists rather than a sustained intellectual critique of Freudian Leftist thought. As Didier Eribon has argued, Foucault is more interested in critiquing not the specificities of Reich and Marcuse, but “a generalized Reichianism in fact, that colored the political vision of the [French] far Left” (56). The link between Reich and Eros and Civilization in the French Left of 1970s may have influenced Foucault to conflate the two’s work, even though

22 The same year, the writer of the article, journalist Mildred Edie Brady also brought an emerging West Coast bohemia to the attention of Harper’s readers. I discuss this article, “The New Cult of Sex and Anarchy” in the first chapter.
23 For a more complete account of Reich’s life and influence on the counter-culture see Jeffrey Kripal and Christopher Turner.
24 Reich received a sympathetic portrayal in the 1971 Yugoslavian film W.R.: Mysteries of the Organism.
Marcuse substantially critiqued Reich’s simplistic dualism in *Eros and Civilization*. In his first lecture at the Collège de France in 1976, given while he was researching *History of Sexuality*, Foucault refers to Marcuse and Reich in the same sentence, though he does not directly engage with either of their ideas. Instead, in the lecture, they stand as shorthand for a model of repressive power endemic to a wider societal discourse, of which psychoanalysis and Marxism are part of, but by no means solely constituent of. In short, Reich and Marcuse are figureheads for a wider discursive construction of the repressive hypothesis, which had been newly associated with Reich and Marcuse while Foucault was writing *History of Sexuality*.

With these rhetorical gestures, Foucault is able to distance his new model from anything smacking of a simplistic representation of repression. Yet at the same time, in this above passage, Foucault demonstrates how he is indebted to theories of repression. Rather than negating the repressive hypothesis, he circumscribes it with an even larger discursive field; repression is merely a local instance of a larger “deployment of sexuality” which Foucault sketches out for us. Instead of offering something radically new, Foucault has pressed deeper into the workings of power to see that the repressive hypothesis is only one tool which has obscured the arsenal of techniques used by biopolitical administration. *History of Sexuality*’s shift from repression’s “no-yes logic” to biopolitics’ “gradational continuity” extends rather than negates the logic of repression, Lynne Huffer following Mary Beth Mader has argued (Huffer 26). If we read this shift in the understanding of the relationship between power and sex more as an important development of a fruitful intellectual moment rather than as a radical turn, we are obliged to acknowledge that Foucault’s critique of the repressive hypothesis
developed out of, alongside and in tension with contemporaneous theories of sexuality and power. These writers were also finding the binary logic of repression an impasse for thinking about sexuality’s relationship to power. By subscribing to the narrative of Foucault’s “famous critique” we have obscured a wide-ranging post-war discourse of sexual liberation in America that rather than being wedded to the repressive hypothesis, was like Foucault, trying to move around or past the binary logic of the repressive hypothesis.

There are two glaring ironies with the “common sense” Foucaultianism on which much of queer theory’s work relies. The first is that it is strikingly un-Foucaultian to conceive of the end of the repressive hypothesis as a rupture within discourse. Rhetorical gestures like those of Muñoz, Warner and Parker (and several others) recapitulate the before/after logic of the repressive hypothesis as if to say that now we are free of the repressive hypothesis we can begin to really understand the relationship between sexuality and power (something Foucault repeatedly warns against in History of Sexuality). Alongside this methodological irony, the narrative of his superseding the repressive hypothesis grants Foucault an author function which abstracts him from a historical moment of a widespread and multifaceted cultural discourse about desire’s role in social formation. As only a few critics have pointed out, Foucault’s work was engaged

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25 Eribon argues that Foucault’s text is mostly also a response to Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s Anti-Oedipus and Guy Hocquenghem’s Homosexual Desire.

26 In his “Preface” to Deleuze and Guattari’s Anti-Oedipus (1972) Foucault himself explains this historical discourse. He writes that between 1945-1965 in Europe there was a “certain way of thinking correctly, a certain style of political discourse a certain ethics of the individual” that involved both Marx and Freud, a “measure of oneself and one’s time acceptable” (xi). The “familiar dualistic interpretation” had failed and led to perhaps the end of a Marxist tradition and Freudian one: “It is true that the old banners were raised, but the combat shifted and spread into new zones” (xii). Foucault at once distances himself and Deleuze and Guattari’s work from this discourse as he realizes they are indebted to and part of this discourse, whose most important development is the recognition of the impasse of dualistic thinking about desire and power.
with the ideas of a larger discourse of sexual liberation from interwar Freudian psychoanalysis to New Left and counter-cultural movements. It is crucial to understand how the critique of the repressive hypothesis develops out of and alongside a widespread discourse of sexual liberation that sought to understand the relationships between the logics of sex and the logics of power outside of the repression narrative.

The second irony is more serious. While Foucault has isolated the inherent dualism of the repressive hypothesis’s conception of power, Sedgwick and Judith Butler have questioned whether Foucault’s “productive” conception of power actually solves this problem of dualism. Butler asks whether Foucault breaks us out of the “dialectical impasse, conditioned by a false premise” in which desire can only be thought in terms of repression and emancipation (Subjects 221). In Gender Trouble, Butler argues that Foucault’s model of sexual politics repeats the liberation politics he critiques in which: “the overthrow of ‘sex’ results in the release of a primary multiplicity, a notion not so far afield from the psychoanalytic postulation of primary polymorphousness or Marcuse’s notion of an original and creative bisexual Eros subsequently repressed by an instrumentalist culture” (Subjects 225). For Butler (who oversimplifies Marcuse), Foucault remains a “tenuous dialectician.” Instead of employing a Hegelian dialectic which requires a series of constant negations toward an eventual unity, Foucault proposes an endless proliferation of opposites which promise to “undermine the hegemony of the binary” but merely shift the binary onto an ontological/epistemological framework. That is the “bodies and pleasures” Foucault speaks about as the source of new “deployment”

27 Carolyn Dean, Huffer, and McCann and Szalay all make the case for historicizing Foucault’s work within broader intellectual and social histories. Similarly, Paul Breines has argued that the differences between Marcuse and Foucault have been drastically overstated and should be linked to larger debates within a historical moment of the New Left and gay liberation.
of sexuality becomes something that is acted on–repressed, regulated, disciplined, produced–by power.

Similarly, Sedgwick’s later work speaks of a frustration with this dialectical impasse that “theory” cannot seem to resolve or ignore (though it often acts as it has). Sedgwick argues that Foucault may be “far more persuasive in analyzing this massive intellectual blockage than in finding ways to obviate it” (*Weather* 133). Echoing Butler’s critique, Sedgwick speaks of the unfulfillable promise of a way to “think around” the repressive hypothesis, outside of the binary to “forms of thought that would not be structured by the question of prohibition in the first place” (*Touching* 12). In their 1995 essay on mid-century psychologist Silvan Tompkins, Sedgwick and Adam Frank argue that “anti-essentialist theory” is bound up in the model of prohibition, relying on a dualistic polarization of the infinitely complex and the binary. Sedgwick finds herself returning to pre-Foucaultian concepts: to other forms of thought which allow finitely many \( n>2 \) values, a realm of thought, which she later calls “the middle range of agency” that moves beyond the binary, but without recourse to an unstructured infinitely proliferating multitude of possibility. Sedgwick and Frank wish to find realms of thought that develop analytical models within this \( n>2 \) realm. That is, like the writers in this dissertation, they seek to find other logics between or beside the polarities of binary logics and infinite differentiation.

To clarify, let’s examine the description of the highway van-floor orgy from Weatherman Mark Rudd. Rudd’s own view of the problem with sex, aside from hedonism, is that it both overly connects and disconnects. It binds all together into a collective that dissolves the individual ego into group identity (in Freud’s terms, Eros
creates a “one out of more than one”). At the same time, it is chaotic and fragmentary: “writhing naked on the floor of the van while hurtling down the interstate—legs, arms, genitals, interlocked with no particular identity attached.” The collective is connected, but the action verbs of “writing” and “hurtling” mirror the chaotic and undefined interlocking of body parts and identities. For Rudd, this “strange, truly disconnected feeling,” is the result of an absence of structure, a chaos and confusion that symbolizes for Rudd the entirety of the Weather Underground’s misguided political decisions. Rudd bounces back and forth between these two understandings of the experience of sex. Rudd’s problem seems to be an inability to “map” or determine the forms of relationality within the orgy other than either connection or disconnection.  

However, if we compare this to Wittman’s metaphor of music in “A Gay Manifesto,” we find that there is a language to discuss the multiple types of conceivable relationships among a collective of lovers. The metaphor of music provides a structure to track and determine the multiple types of relationships that are “infinite and varied” but not reduced to endless flows of difference. These variations are produced through the constraints of instruments and “a mutual production and appreciation of beauty.” It is not the absence of constraint which characterizes the variations of music, but it is through the constraints from which variations arise. Similarly, for Eros, relational and social variation emerge through a set of constraints that instead of limiting Eros, actually produce multiple and varied patterns. The sexual revolutionary writers’ conception of Eros is a language to delineate and produce varied relations and social assemblages into ordered erotic communities. Eros provides a finitely many mode of thought, an alternative logic, not an absence of logic that privileges endless flows and differentiation.

28 I refer here to the concept of “cognitive mapping” in Jameson’s Postmodernism.
This conception of Eros is not wholly different than Foucault’s understanding of the useful political deployment of sex. At the end of *History of Sexuality* Foucault suggests the “tactical reversal of the various mechanism of sexuality” that breaks from the agency of sexuality. This counter-deployment would be achieved through a new articulation of “bodies and pleasures” (157). Bodies and pleasures are not reducible to “sexuality” or “desire”; discourses other than sexuality or desire as agency can emerge from the movements of bodies and pleasures. As he notes in an interview “Friendship as a Way of Life” (1981), “The problem is not to discover in oneself the truth of one’s sex, but, rather, to use one’s sexuality henceforth to arrive at a multiplicity of relationships” (138). Homosexuality, for example, “is a historical occasion to reopen affective and relational virtualities, not so much through the intrinsic qualities of the homosexual but because of the ‘slantwise’ position of the latter, as it were, the diagonal lines he can lay out in the social fabric allow these virtualities to come to light” (138). These new virtualities in the social fabric, which arise through both the homosexual’s “slantwise” (not merely oppositional) position and the multiplicity of relationships through sexual practices are what create the fear of the queer planet Warner articulates. “Het” culture does not fear unsanctioned pleasure but the idea that monogamous heterosexual desire need not be “the elemental form of human association” (xxii). What is regulated (whether through repression or disciplinary means) is not just the subject’s access to rightful pleasure but alternative and viable forms of attachment that might threaten preexisting power relationships. Similar to Roszak’s concept of counter-culture and Marcuse’s idea of the Great Refusal, these alternative and viable forms are not characterized by their strict oppositional positions but by their “slantwise” positions, the diagonal lines they
create out of the right-angle grids of the social fabric. This play between the lines of relational norm and relational experimentation is not simply an either-or, but a process of twisting, perversion or mutation. As Huffer argues in *Mad For Foucault*, the term “queer” might be best thought as synonyms of “oblique” or “slanting” which signal a “new way of speaking.” That is, queer emerges not from outside, but from within, emerges from contradictions within the norm.²⁹ Huffer finds within Foucault’s *History of Madness* a Foucaultian ethics of Eros that moves beyond the “pure negativity of ethical rupture” by demonstrating ways of “turning adversity into new ways of thinking, feeling and acting in the world” (2). In this respect, Foucault’s understanding of Eros as new epistemological frames and modes of existence that arise from desire is not altogether different than his American contemporaries, who in their encounter with sexuality find new ways of speaking and thinking otherwise about relationality.³⁰ As such, reevaluating his contemporaries may help us understand how to better understand and develop “new relational possibilities” not only out of heterosexual structures, but out of all social structures.

Accordingly, I employ many queer techniques and make a case for understanding this project as a queer project. Despite my argument that Foucault’s famous critique of Marcuse is really not a critique of Marcuse’s work, I find Foucault’s work foundational for my methodology. Though I do not employ his work within the body of the dissertation and focus only on American writers and theorists, his discursive understanding of sexuality as an effect of power is essential to my reading practices. As

²⁹ Similarly Todd May uses Jacques Ranciére’s idea of “twisting” or “tort” to think about queer readings of power relations. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri also employ a “oblique or diagonal stance” as a critical heuristic in *Empire* (212)

³⁰ Nevertheless, a crucial difference is that Huffer finds that Foucault’s ethics of Eros are primarily an ethics of subjective practice, not necessarily social practice.
such, I depart from many of the writers in this dissertation who ascribe to Eros an ontological character as a vitalist force of attachment. The main difference between the understanding of Eros for writers like Marcuse is that it exists prior to forms of relationality. That is, Eros creates relationality. For Foucault, by contrast, Eros exists as a concept, not a force, that is an effect of relationality. In this dissertation, I am interested in the latter method of tracking the discursive construction and revision of Eros through the sexual revolution. Unlike some of the writers in this study, I do not describe an essential character to Eros. Rather, I am interested in the strategic deployment of a discourse of love to describe social forms.

This discursive deployment of Eros as a logic of social form is related to particular post war intellectual and technological developments. As I demonstrate in the dissertation, these other modes of thought have enormous influence on the discursive construction of Eros in postwar America. In the sixties Sedgwick notes a numbers of discourses invoking “nondualistic approaches” to a wide range of topics: physics, ecology, cybernetics, spirituality and psychoanalysis. Sedgwick calls this a “rich moment, a rich intellectual ecology” or a “cybernetic fold” of structuralist thought that attempted to move outside the binary logic of prohibition (“Shame” 508). However, this synchronic moment also exists within a diachronic trajectory. As Marianne DeKoven has demonstrated, Marcuse along with New Left and counter-cultural writing in general, can best be seen as a part of pivot point between modernist master narratives’ faith in binary thought and postmodern’s rejection of the binary toward in favor of intellectual models based on the proliferation of difference. Just as cybernetic and ecological models emerged through historical and technological developments that lead to understanding
more complex (non-binary) systems, much of the sixties critique of social binary thought developed through the modes of structuralist thinking that embraced conceptual models of systems, networks and cycles that demonstrate complex non-binary relationships between entities.

In this light, Foucault is one of many in a larger intellectual moment across multiple disciplines in the twentieth century that sought new conceptual models to understand increasingly complex power relationships outside of the binary logic of prohibition. I follow Sedgwick’s concern that that our indebtedness to Foucault may have caused us to “lose conceptual access to an entire thought realm,” a realm which can allow us that explore finitely many but not endlessly proliferating social worlds and political potentials (“Shame” 512). The discovery of “bodies and pleasures” reveal the multiplicity of possible counter-deployments of sexuality; but how might we determine which ones are socially and politically viable and useful? Similarly to Sedgwick, I do not wish to argue a “return” to this moment of structuralist thinking, but in this dissertation I explore the possibilities of well-developed conceptual models which may mean “more different and more interesting things” than those concepts which survived into poststructuralism and subsequently into queer theory’s foundational assumptions about the sociality of desire (“Shame” 508). I hope to demonstrate that the concept of Eros as utilized by sexual revolutionary writers presents compelling and useful conceptual models for understanding the centrality of desire within postwar social formation and emergent forms of queer belonging. If contemporary queer theory is invested in the search for new relational possibilities and new distributions of power outside of the logics of prohibition,
which ones have been overshadowed by the difficulty of answering anything but Foucault?

**Producing Erotic Communities**

Another reason the sexual revolution remains understudied is its primarily heterosexual character. While post-Stonewall radical gay and lesbian activist groups and writers were influenced by writers like Marcuse, Brown and Reich, until the 1970s, the most thorough engagement with politicized Eros was by heterosexual writers. Most of the writers in this dissertation are heterosexual and assume heterosexual desire for most of their readers (Baldwin and Lorde are notable exceptions). However, I hope to show that these writers were not always heteronormative; they sought to challenge such predominant heretonormative social forms as the family and the couple-form, and in their widespread embrace of bisexuality and polymorphous perversity, often compulsory heterosexual desire itself. However, they also sought to challenge the relational and social norms of social structures like the economy and the nation—after all, in their mind, they were all integrated with each other into a totalizing whole. For them, heterosexual norms are not a regime entirely of their own making but intimately connected and coextensive with a totalizing system of constraints. As such I view these writers as doing something like a proto-queer project; they twist, subvert, pervert the norms of their social world to create new modes of “queer” belonging.

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32 Although one could make the argument that their understanding of the sociality of Eros is dependent on their bisexual and homosexual assumptions.

33 The patriarchal and masculine understanding of desire from Henry Miller and Norman Mailer are an exception here.
This “queering” has formal corollaries in the novels I have chosen to represent the radical political project of sexual revolution. As theorists like Fredric Jameson have demonstrated in *The Political Unconscious*, the novel is a privileged realm for describing social forms. As the social forms change in the sexual revolution and new social forms become newly imaginable, this necessitates formal inventiveness and experimentation in the novel. Even in such formally complex and inventive texts like Pynchon’s *Gravity’s Rainbow* and Bambara’s *The Salt Eaters*, experimentation is not pressed toward estrangement. Formal experimentation in these novels is best read as an attempt to articulate the complexity of possible social forms distinct from The System. As such, I have chosen novels that describe erotic communities and are focused on describing the relations between characters rather than on the interiority of characters themselves. These novels all have central protagonists that are relatively absent or de-centered. These pseudo-protagonists like Will, the visitor to the utopia of Huxley’s *Island*; Slothrop, the untraceable center of *Gravity’s Rainbow*; Rufus, who commits suicide early on in *Another Country*; and Velma, the silent center of *The Salt Eaters*, exist more as entry points into the social assemblages of the novels than as the center of their respective novel’s narrative. While the interiority of characters is important in these novels, it is the relationships between characters that animate the plots of the novels and structure their form.

Form in these texts is best understood as a strategy of articulating social relationality through the movement of Eros among and between the characters. In this respect, these texts do not imagine wholly new or completely liberated social worlds and

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34 I do not make a claim here for all sixties culture and literature. There are several writers like William s. Burroughs, Allen Ginsberg and Ishmael Reed for whom aesthetic experimentation was intended to estrange readers.
characters. Rather they are keenly interested in how to tell the stories of sexways and erotic communities that emerge in the relationships between characters living in an established social world. With the exception of the utopian visions of Miller and Huxley, these writers arrive at new social forms and novelistic form through a process of “slanting”; innovation here is not simply creation but an imaginative production of twisting, re-vision and counter-deployment. We can think of this as a type of queer formalism articulated by queer literary critics like David Halperin. In describing the way queers rework mainstream cultural forms, he writes: “Either they have to invent perverse relations to such forms, or they have to find in such forms opportunities or occasions or permissions for particular non-standard ways of feeling” (346). In Halperin’s mind, queers do not create wholly oppositional forms but create new forms through perverting or appropriating existing cultural forms. The writers in these studies invent perverse relationships at the level of character/group and at the level of novelistic form. At the same time, they find in existing modes of thought like Asian spirituality, systems theory, literary history and the past, new forms to inhabit, re-appropriate and modify.

There is not a single dominant concept of Eros in this text; rather I am interested in tracking the changing discursive construction of Eros as attachment through the period. Rather than impose artificial relationships on these texts, I have attempted to demonstrate how these writers engaged the concepts of sexual revolution circulating in their contemporary moment. In choosing American writers and theorists, I have deliberately left out extended discussion of crucial theorists in 1960s-1970s continental theory.\footnote{In addition to Foucault, other postwar French theorists who are relevant here would be Jacques Lacan, Roland Barthes, Georges Bataille, Jean-Paul Sartre, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, Monique Wittig, Luce Irigaray and Guy Hocquenghem.}

While my own analytical methods are indebted to these approaches and they have much
to add to the discussion of the centrality of desire to social formation, their work was either published or translated into English after most of the texts in my study. The writers and theorists in this dissertation were not heavily influenced by their ideas if they were at all. My purpose is to demonstrate that there was a pervasive conversation in America on the relationship between sexuality and politics that is relatively distinct from the project in France. Accordingly I have tried to describe this discourse of Eros as thoroughly as possible through its own central texts.

The first chapter, “Hesitant Steps Away From Dualism in The New Cult of Sex and Anarchy,” describes the emergence of a West Coast discourse of politicized Eros in the late 1950s and early 1960s. I argue that a network of writers comprising Henry Miller, Aldous Huxley, Herbert Marcuse and Alan Watts develop non-dualistic understandings of sexuality through an engagement with counter-Enlightenment philosophy and Asian spirituality. Their critique of Freud’s “fatal dialectic of civilization” of instinct/society leads them to imagine self-regulating social systems where Eros is harmonized with social order. However, through a reading of the utopian erotic communities in Miller’s memoir Big Sur and The Oranges of Hieronymus Bosch and Huxley’s novel Island, I uncover a deep concern over the easy slippage from libidinal self-regulation to hedonism. Both of their texts include episodes of child sexual exploitation which presumably their self-regulating utopias should eliminate. This display of unrestrained sexuality forces Miller and Huxley to examine the potentially troublesome effects of self-regulation. They find because libidinal and social self-regulation has been promoted within a postwar social structure whose relational logics are based on the dualism and domination, self-regulation easily becomes read a license
and justification for hedonism. While Huxley’s and Miller’s texts retreat back into their utopian realms, Marcuse and Watts explore more deeply the political potentials of libidinal rationality in American postwar society and find in Eros new models for solidarity and social ethics that emerge from within the contradictions of one-dimensional society, not opposed or outside of them.

This concern with the distinction between hedonism and self-regulation is also apparent in Thomas Pynchon’s sixties novels, *The Crying of Lot 49* and *Gravity’s Rainbow* which I read in the second chapter, “The Irreducible Strangeness of Pleasure and The Perceptible Hazards of Love in Pynchon’s Sixties Writing.” In these novels, sexuality is described as “an irreducible strangeness,” an aspect of experience that cannot be rationalized or systematized by powerful institutions. Pynchon calls into question the counter-cultural and New Left concept of the totalizing “System” and demonstrates in his novels how all rational systems are frustrated in their attempts to fully regulate and control Eros. Similar to the inability of agencies to track Slothrop, Eros is figured as something that continually eludes attempts of control. However, rather than embrace this aspect of Eros as unreason, Pynchon interrogates the political embrace of irrationality as liberation. Countering readings of the Rocket in *Gravity’s Rainbow* as the epitome of technological rationality, I argue that it should be read as an explosive force of irrationality that mirrors sexual liberation narratives. Counter-cultural theorists such as Norman O. Brown emphasized the political and social potentials of a mysterious Eros, what critics McCann and Szalay have characterized as an ineffective counter-cultural politics of the “spontaneous, the symbolic, and ultimately the magical” (436). However, Pynchon critiques this line of thought in the novel, presenting the possibility that
unqualified liberation can lead to the type of monstrous destruction and exploitation we see in the Rocket.

The “Zone” of Gravity’s Rainbow, the anarchic territory of Europe immediately after World War II, also provides an alternative understanding of the social world as composed of proliferations of relations. In the vacuum created by the sudden absence of state and military power, the residents of the Zone create multiple forms of attachment from fleeting sexual encounters to full-scale alternative societies. In this chapter, I examine the types of erotic assemblages that emerge from the wreck of postwar Europe. Pynchon provides many types of erotic assemblage in the novel, but they fail to come together as erotic communities. Even ones like the “army of lovers” of radical students are built around erotic identification with a totem or ideal that allows for communal identification but does not allow for non-exploitative democratic relationships of reciprocality and interdependence. In this respect, the erotic assemblages Pynchon describes are little different from the cults around the Rocket. Pynchon demonstrates the power of Eros to bind collectives but not always within politically free and egalitarian ways. Nevertheless, Pynchon does find potential in erotic attachment as a basis for social and political forms provided that it encourages a mutual production of social constraint negotiated between lovers.

Pynchon focuses less on Eros as an affect or drive than as a reciprocal process of interpersonal negotiation. This concept of love as an interpersonal process is developed more extensively in Chapter Three, “Love is Another Country: Erotic Publics in Baldwin’s Sixties Writing.” In the chapter, I argue that Baldwin provides a model of love as a powerful metaphor for his understanding of democratic political engagement.
Baldwin’s sixties novels, *Another Country* and *Tell Me How Long the Train’s Been Gone* explore the ability of Eros to structure social worlds distinct from the traditional raced erotic bonds that comprise American culture. These novels and Baldwin’s essays articulate a politicized love that imagines how a political public can “act like lovers” as he puts it in *The Fire Next Time*. If America is already an erotic community in that it binds its citizens by nationality and history, then Eros does not provide a way to escape this American attachment. Rather, it presents a way of re-imagining it by reworking a relational structure of domination toward one based on reciprocity and mutuality. Love in this sense is not only a relational or personal ethic; it is also a social and political one that reworks existing frameworks of constraint into new ones. In his articulations of erotic communities in the two novels, Baldwin demonstrates how America could become “another country” built upon attachments transformed through a political process modeled on love. Such a political process I argue is more akin to Hannah Arendt’s description of liberal politics in *The Human Condition* than it is to the New Left theorizing of figures like Marcuse. As such, Baldwin’s local models of erotic communities are metaphors for the type of liberal political engagement he wishes to see at a national level.

Similar to the other writers in this study, Baldwin is quick to distinguish the hedonism of sexual liberation from the difficult social negotiations involved in love. In Baldwin’s mind, love expands beyond mere sex because love cannot escape its imbrication in the social-historical world. To believe that love can somehow transcend the social realm and be fully private is to remain in a type of “innocence,” a willful ignorance. Such a willful ignorance Baldwin finds a crucial part of the American white
male psyche and is particularly critical of attempts by sexual revolution figures and movements to leave the world behind in their glorification of the orgasm. Not only is this innocence an abandonment of social responsibility and a marker of privilege, but it is also a way to replicate social forms of exploitation in the supposedly private realm of love. Instead Baldwin finds in Eros a process of negotiation between lovers who understand their positions within the social world and work together to produce new forms of attachment.

Baldwin’s understanding of Eros as always already embedded in social and historical structures is particularly influential for black women novelists and theorists of the 1970s. In chapter four, “From Within Outward: Patterns of Relationality in Bambara’s The Salt Eaters,” I examine the black feminist revision of sexual revolution. Black feminists theorists, particularly Audre Lorde and Hortense Spillers, offer a different conception of Eros as a force of attachment that can bridge individual difference. In Lorde’s conception, echoed in Bambara’s novel, Eros is a force of power that works from “within outward,” flowing through the individual and making attachments with others outside of the self. Lorde’s revision of Eros sees it not only as a force of attachment but as a force that can bridge relations across difference. That is, it provides a way to bring together individuals from different social positions; it is a way to name patterns of relationality within a complex social world, to create identity across difference. For Spillers, Eros is not merely a force to be de-repressed. It highlights how a relational grammar can be reworked and reframed in concepts that are not limited to Eros.
This expansion of Eros toward other forms of relatinality is demonstrated in Bambara’s *The Salt Eaters* which looks back on the liberation movements of the sixties to understand the failures and opportunities it created. The post-sixties moment for Bambara presents a challenge of naming and articulating the force of attachment within a social world of difference; the characters in the novel are all suffering for lack of a workable “framework” to understand relatinality and social form within their experience. However, for Bambara Eros is only one way of naming relatinality. Naming and articulating the “nameless and formless” aspects of experience for Bambara is a political act in that to name forces of attachment is to shape political relationality. To limit relatinality to Eros is to limit the frameworks through which we can conceive the social world; Eros obscures the plurality of available and possible frameworks for articulating the social world. *The Salt Eaters* endorses the plurality of available patterns and discourses for articulating a social structure of Bambara’s revolutionary goal of a “free society of whole individuals.”

Ultimately these writers, reacting against what they see as a singular totalizing System which can only view relatinality in terms of conformity and exploitation, do not attempt to recreate oppositional totalizing societies. With the exception of Miller and Huxley, they do not privilege a singular utopian model of erotic communities. Rather, they find in Eros a powerful tool for articulating multiple registers of social attachment that emerge from relations and social forms created within the cracks and disturbances of the postwar social world. They privilege a conception of Eros as an open-ended and non-deterministic structure that produces varied forms of attachment. In the words of Wittman, they are interested not in defining the ethics of the duet or the politics of the
symphony, but in articulating what ensemble forms can potentially exist between these
two extremes. What music can they and will they produce? In between the couple and the
totality of the social, new relational possibilities and alternative social forms cannot help
but emerge, and these writers articulate them through the fruitful perversion of the
language of love.
Chapter One: Hesitant Steps Away From Dualism in The New Cult of Sex and Anarchy

“But in the administered society, the biological necessity does not immediately issue in action; organization demands counter-organization. Today the fight for life, the fight for Eros, is the political fight.”

- Herbert Marcuse, “Political Preface” (1966) to *Eros and Civilization*

The post-war bohemian centers of California rivaled Greenwich Village in the number of writers exploring the political, social and aesthetic opportunities raised by the sexual revolution. Mirroring a demographic shift to the West Coast in the post-war era, several East Coast and Western European émigrés moved to communities in and around Los Angeles and San Francisco where they developed much of the political, intellectual and aesthetic foundations of the sixties counterculture. Linking the Northern and Southern outposts was the rural coastal expanse of Big Sur, virtually inaccessible until the Pacific Coast Highway was completed in 1937. This rocky stretch of desolate and visually striking coastline became home to Henry Miller in 1944 and the Esalen Institute in 1962. Circulating in and around Big Sur were Beats Allen Ginsberg and Jack Kerouac who made pilgrimages to the Bay Area joining poets like Gary Snyder and Kenneth Rexroth; a group of British expatriates interested in mysticism in Los Angeles like Aldous Huxley, Christopher Isherwood and Gerald Heard; and public intellectuals like Herbert Marcuse, Norman O. Brown and Alan Watts. Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, this group developed and promoted the idea that sex meant more than reproduction or pleasure but was also a measure of political freedom.

Berkeley journalist Mildred Edie Brady dubbed the artists and writers associated with Henry Miller, “The New Cult of Sex and Anarchy.” In a 1947 article for *Harper’s Magazine*, Brady dismisses this new West Coast bohemia against the previous
generation’s Paris and Greenwich Village. Brady finds fault with the new Californian bohemia’s lack of a coherent worldview, calling them “philosophical improvisers” who “toss everything into their pot” including the disparate theories of Wilhelm Reich, Emma Goldman, William Blake and Madame Blavatsky (316). Brady describes the results as:

...a combination of anarchism and certain concepts related to psychoanalysis which together yield a philosophy—holding on the one hand that you must abandon the church, the state, and the family (even if you do it, as James Joyce preached, “by treachery, cunning, and exile”); and on the other hand offering sex as the source of individual salvation in a collective world that’s going to hell. (313)

Brady finds sex to be the link between psychoanalysis's understanding of desire and anarchism’s program of individual liberation. In Brady’s framing, sexual pleasure embodies the freedom an individual gains for turning her back on the collective world. However, Brady suspects that this elevation of sexual pleasure to cosmic levels masks individual hedonism and an abandonment of social responsibility. Additionally Brady describes a Reichian utopian agenda of a self-regulating sexuality that dispenses with the need for sexual repression: “Everybody would be wholesomely self-regulatory. All would respond to the ‘natural biological law’ freely and spontaneously” (315). Brady thinks such schemes are not only ridiculous but portend troubling and antisocial effects of sexual liberation. As such, Brady repeats the familiar dichotomy of sex and society and finds that by embracing sexual pleasure as the highest spiritual value, the new bohemians portray no interest in social affairs other than in being liberated from their constraints.

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36 Brady, who focuses heavily on the influence of Wilhelm Reich in this piece, the same year wrote an article for The New Republic, “The Strange Case of Wilhelm Reich,” which severely critiqued Reich’s idea and public persona. This article prompted an FDA investigation into Reich’s methods, eventually leading to his imprisonment in 1957 (Turner 292).

37 Brady misquotes Joyce’s Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man (1917). The original quotation is “silence, exile, and cunning” (247). Brady’s switch of “treachery” for “silence” ascribes a sinister motive to the bohemians.
Yet as I argue in this chapter, contrary to most critical approaches that repeat Brady’s sexual-political dualism, the link between desire and politics in this work is not primarily focused through liberation. Instead, these writers see desire as central to any social formation, and following from this, they devise new social configurations composed of alternative relational logics. While there were certainly writers promoting the erotic thrill of liberation, most were only interested in the antisocial or anticommutitarian aspects of desire insofar as these allowed them to imagine new modes of attachment. The critical tradition within literary and sexuality studies has tended to narrow the scope of these writers to promoters of what Foucault dismissed as “the repressive hypothesis.”38 As such, critics have failed to treat many of these writers and theories with serious theoretical consideration despite their important impact on American culture, sexuality and politics.39

This slight is based on the misunderstanding of the Freudian Left as a coherent body of work of liberationist sexual-political rather than a diverse body of theory interested in charting out the conceptual link between desire and social structure. It is worth recalling that throughout the twentieth century, psychoanalysis and Marxism provided the most well-developed conceptual vocabulary of desire and social structure (the persistence of psychoanalytic and Marxist categories today further demonstrates this

38 Sean McCann and Michael Szalay in “Do You Believe in Magic?” are emblematic of recent criticism which finds fault in countercultural writers for their uncritical embrace of the utopian promises of de-regulation and their corresponding beliefs in the political power of the “spontaneous, the symbolic, and ultimately the magical” (436). While I agree with their critique of liberationist mystical thinking, I am arguing that they limit their texts to merely this dimension.

39 Marianne DeKoven notes that many sixties texts suffer from a “near-disappearance off the intellectual-cultural map” (19). While DeKoven locates this slight to their liminal position between modernism and postmodernism, I would argue that with these texts in particular, their disappearance is the result of their mistaken liberationist agenda and supposed collusion with the “repressive hypothesis” critiqued by Foucault. Berlant’s “ʻ68, or Something” critiques the pervasive idea in the academy that sixties literature is utopian and naively liberationist.
ambiguous inheritance). Some writers did imagine liberation by using these concepts; however, more accurately, most used this vocabulary to construct and imagine alternative social logics of desire. While Freudian Left theory is important for these writers, their texts cannot be easily reduced to promotion of its more liberationist claims. In most of this work, as I will demonstrate below in an analysis of Miller, Huxley, Marcuse and Watts, Freudian and Marxist theory is fused with other discourses like Asian and occult spirituality and a wide array of counter-Enlightenment philosophy and literature. They did not turn to new forms of thought merely to find new modes of liberation; they saw these modes of thought as offering avenues to alternative social organizations apart from a modernity which was increasingly organized by one totalizing social logic of domination (in sixties vernacular, “The System”). In fact these writers saw the same problem of dualism that Foucault saw in Freudian Left ideas, and they found in these other fields ways to reframe the dualist understanding of desire and power in psychoanalysis and Marxism.

In reframing these concepts, the writers in this chapter focus on Eros as a force of interpersonal attachment, not as a force of antisocial rupture or subjective pleasure. Both the Platonic and Freudian conception of Eros primarily see desire as a force of attachment, in Freud’s words “the making of one out of more than one” (Freud 65). In this conception, pleasure is harmonized with attachment but its polymorphously perverse and aim-inhibited character—that is, Eros does not reach toward a predetermined single

40 In Big Sur, Miller describes a “potpourri” of new ideas mixing in Big Sur: “Nearly every one seems to be a specialist in some field, be it in art, archaeology, linguistics, symbolism, Dianetics, Zen Buddhism or Irish folklore” (35). In the same vein, Jeffrey J. Kripal argues that Esalen embodied “a religion of no religion,” a departure from a single dogma in favor of a bricolage of new modes of thought created out of the intersections of established ones. Yet not all of these bodies of thought were spiritual or historical; Marcuse, Huxley and Watts also saw technological progress (mainly cybernetics) as opening new modes of thought and experience.
object but nonetheless reaches out toward objects—means that attachments can create many different types of relationships, some more free and egalitarian than others.

Additionally, Eros expands beyond the narrow focus on gentility or reproduction; it is the pull of attachment that pervades all human relationships. If the Freudian Left’s major contribution to sexual revolutionary thought is to see desire as central to all social foundations, then postwar America (dominated by The System) has its own form of erotic attachment that these writers find neither free nor egalitarian. They find this postwar social structure to be saturated by a dualist conception of desire in which Eros is always opposed to civilization. While they do attempt to break free of the social and political repression of American postwar culture, they find that liberation alone is not sufficient. Rather, they critique the very dualist foundations of the logic of prohibition, which can only see freedom only as liberation from all social constraint. Instead of arguing for Eros to overpower civilization, they ask how Eros can be harmonized with civilization. This leads them to promote self-regulating erotic communities based on a structure of social attachment and constraints within Eros itself, a relational logic Marcuse calls “libidinal rationality.” As such, they find that Eros provides them with a new logics of social relations and new social forms that I have termed “erotic communities.”

In the middle part of this chapter, I analyze two literary examples of utopian erotic communities in Huxley’s utopian novel Island (1962) and Miller’s memoir Big Sur and The Oranges of Hieronymus Bosch (1957). Yet their texts also betray an anxiety that self-regulation skirts too close to hedonistic permissiveness. Like many texts of the sexual revolution (Lolita for example), the intrusion of hedonistic permissiveness in the form of child sexuality and child sexual exploitation calls into question the ethics of their
self-regulating social worlds. This display of unrestrained sexuality pushed to the extreme amidst a full-throttled endorsement of libidinal self-regulation forces Miller and Huxley to examine the unsavory effects of sexual revolution. While their self-regulating social worlds work for them as utopias cut off from outside, they find that in contact with the outside world, their theories of sexual and social self-regulation easily become justification for the exploitation and oppression they wish to eliminate. Libidinal and social self-regulation when promoted within a postwar social structure whose relational logics are based on the dualism of domination, self-regulation easily becomes read a license and justification for hedonism. While Huxley’s and Miller’s texts retreat back into their utopian realms, Marcuse and Watts delve more deeply into the political potentials of libidinal rationality in American postwar society and find in Eros new models for solidarity and social ethics.

**Between Opposite and Different**

Californian geography, with its rural expanses and its relative proximity to Asia played an important role in the development of ideas in the “New Cult of Sex and Anarchy” of the 1950s. Watts, a countercultural Zen popularizer and one of the first teachers at the Esalen Institute, which beginning in 1962 popularized Asian spirituality, New Age practices, and gestalt psychology, describes Big Sur as:

...a magical stretch of coast known to some of its older inhabitants as Gondwanaland—the remaining fringe of a lost country which is not really part of the United States. The territory runs from Monterey, at its northern end, to a point somewhat south of Big Sur and north of San Simeon: you have to have a special feeling for the area to know just where the southern limit of the magic lies. *(In My 241)*
Watts describes the landscape as geographically outside of the United States; because it is not bounded by strict cartographic borders, one must be able to intuit its geographical limits in order to understand this “lost country.” Like Watts, who notes the resemblance to Gondwanaland, a name for one of the prehistoric continents, Miller describes it as if an explorer discovering a land of unspoiled Edenic splendor: “This is the California that men dreamed of years ago, this is the Pacific that Balboa looked out on from the Peak of Darien, this is the face of the earth as the Creator intended it to look” (Big Sur 6).

Miller’s and Watts’ deep romanticism engenders the landscape with an ancient spiritualized past that serves as a place out of time and place from the rest of post-war America. Yet the romanticism of the Californian bohemians differs from Rousseau-inspired romanticism in that Watts’ and Miller’s descriptions are both at some remove from a pure, unspoiled nature. Watts does not term Big Sur “Gondwanaland” himself, but rather he points to its imaginative association relayed by others. Similarly in Miller’s description, the Western trope of discovery and exploration speaks both to the first discovery and the connection to the thrill of subsequent discoveries of the same place.

We can further see this impulse in Miller’s description of America in Air Conditioned Nightmare: “Topographically the country is magnificent—and terrifying. Why terrifying? Because nowhere else in the world is the divorce between man and nature so complete” (20). The passage demonstrates the tension between “man” and “nature” endemic to traditional romanticism and modernist primitivism. Yet Miller lays his

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41 Of course the land was never really free of human inhabitants. Several Amerindian tribes lived in the area for thousands of years until the late nineteenth century. The Esalen Institute was named after one of these tribes, the Esselen. There were also several Spanish outposts and by the time Miller arrived, a loose community of artists, ranchers and social outcasts.

42 Most of the writers I will discuss in this chapter routinely refer to “man” when discussing universal humanity. This is both a falsely universal and exclusionary term, as Kate Millet
emphasis on the division between the terms itself, not in the power of man over nature. In other words, the source of this rift between Americans and their topography is made in the process of “divorce” itself; their separation is co-determinate with their opposition. Miller does not want to argue for “nature” over “man” but to harmonize these polarities into some other configuration and to challenge the initial act of divorce itself. For example, in *Big Sur*, Miller writes, “To the west, new land, new figures of earth. Dreamers, outlaws, forerunners. Advancing toward the other world of long ago and far away, the world of yesterday and tomorrow. The world within the world” (8). Miller has difficulty escaping dualist metaphors at the same time he expresses a desire to escape them. In this passage, social change is not the choice of old or new, tradition or progress, but is the result of the creation of a new type of world created from a composition of yesterday and tomorrow. This new world is not a “break” that forms an opposition; rather it exists within this world at the same time it is nevertheless distinct from it. Miller and Watts do not promote a romantic return to a prior Edenic state but attempt to imagine an Edenic state by integrating past and future. They search for what Marcuse called “chance of historical alternatives,” other modes of organizing experience carved out of imagined other social systems of both the past and future. For Watts and Miller, *Big Sur* embodies this harmonization of imagined past and future experience, both of the world and distinct from it.

demonstrates in her critique of Miller, which I address later in this chapter. Throughout the dissertation, I have replaced man with “human,” although I am sympathetic to the feminist, critical race, queer and post-human critiques of this troubling term. At this point it is necessary to highlight how these writers speak toward a non-exclusive “humanity” at the same time they universalize a conception of “man” occupied by the writers themselves, all of whom are white, male and heterosexual.
Following Foucault, critiques of sixties counter-cultures often point to the binary character of their promotion of sex over civilization. However, to focus merely on liberation misses the lengths to which many of these writers go to explore nondualist modes of thought about desire and social forms. For example, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari count Miller, Kerouac and Ginsberg among the “strange Anglo-American literature” they find crucial for formulating their own theories in Anti-Oedipus. This strange literature takes a hesitant step outside of the dualist ordering of experience and while Deleuze and Guattari argue that these pursuits often fail, their texts nevertheless persist in challenge binary thought. When these writers are presented with the “neurotic impasse” between nature or the social world, they discover “through the impasse and triangles a schizophrenic flow moves, irresistibly” (133). These writers’ failure is ultimately a failure of coding itself; their language cannot grasp the more fundamental polyvocity, the “non-sense erected as flow” that escapes the conceptual division of “man” and “nature.” This inability to capture this stream of words that cannot be coded, Deleuze and Guattari suggest, continues to haunt these writers, who keep repeating a futile, but necessary gesture. In the sense, dualist conceptions of desire present an impasse for these writers, not a frame of reference. Yet they must rely somewhat on the inherited dualistic concepts as they move toward forms of non-dualistic thought to find and imagine alternatives to it.

Given the inherited dualist language, it is unsurprising that Foucault criticized the Freudian Left and sixties sexual liberation movements for their reliance on psychoanalysis's hydraulic understanding of desire and power. Yet to claim that all sixties writers shared this analytical frame ignores how theorists like Marcuse and Watts found
something other than a textbook for liberation in the Freudian conception of the social logics of desire. Rather they found in psychoanalysis a way to understand the potentials of Eros to be a force of social cohesion that offered a critique of dualistic relational logics of domination. In Civilization and its Discontents (1930), the foundational text for mid-century Freudian Leftism, Freud claims that the same logic of repression governs both within civilization (the phylogenetic level) and the psyche (ontogenetic level). This conceptual model explicitly links social logic to sexual logic and throughout the twentieth century (until Foucault) was the dominant way of understanding desire’s centrality to social formation. In the Freudian conception, the social world is composed of erotic bonds which are instinctually polymorphous, but pressed into the service of creating attachment. Eros is the “life instinct” whose purpose is “making one out of more than one,” whereas Thanatos, the death instinct works toward disintegration (65). For Marcuse, Eros is a universal force of attachment, “producing and preserving ever greater units to the sexual drives, this striving is at work in every process that preserves life, from the first union of the germ cells to the formation of cultural communities: society and nation” (“Freedom” 19). Civilization is not simply a dialectic between instinct and civilization but the result of the interplay between Eros as a force of attachment and Thanatos as a force of disintegration. Even in Freud’s model, civilization does not so much reject Eros as regulate and manage it. It needs Eros to “libidinally bind” its members:

[Civilization] favors every path by which strong identifications can be established between the members of the community, and it summons up aim-inhibited libido on the largest scale so as to strengthen the communal bond by relations of friendship. In order for these to be fulfilled, a restriction upon sexual life is unavoidable. (69)
In Freud’s mind, society channels Eros into specific aims, primarily weak communal attachment and reproduction, both in service to the aims of civilization. Thus, in the absence of civilization’s repression through the management of desire’s options, Eros would be unrestrained in creating attachments. At its extreme, Eros reaches for a deep unity within connection. Freud notes that the pseudo-spiritual “oceanic feeling” is similar to that of “love” in that they share feelings of “limitlessness” and of a “bond with the universe,” which are developed further into cosmic relations for the more spiritually-inclined members of the Freudian Left like Watts (15). It is primarily this understanding of Eros as a model for attachment that characterizes this tradition as Freudian, not Freud’s exploration of the mechanisms of repression.

Freud saw the restrictions placed on social life a “serious injustice,” and yet he saw no way out of this impasse: “On the one hand love comes into opposition to the interests of civilization; on the other, civilization threatens love with substantial restriction” (58). There is no way out of this rift, because for Freud all civilization must develop the same way. Reich, connecting Freud’s insights with historical materialism, argues that Freud’s model of repression is historically specific; it is not a universal fact of human existence. Freud tells the story of a particular civilization (Reich calls it a “patriarchal authoritarian” one), not the necessary development of all social forms and civilizations. In Reich’s mind, civilization need not repress because the sexual instincts (here orgone, rather than Eros) regulate themselves “without compulsive duty or

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As Kripal argues, another way that dualism was dismantled in this period was the harmonizing of immanence and transcendence. Borrowing from Asian non-dualist thought, transcendence is viewed as the deep feeling of attachment and connection to cosmic entirety, a feeling of “oneness” with the immanent universe from within it. The collapsing of transcendence and immanence into one ontology, what Deleuze and Guattari call “the plane of immanence,” is a crucial move for many in this period, including Marcuse. Watts sees immanent connection as a religious force, while for Marcuse, it is a way to reconceive solidarity.
compulsive morality” (7). As he writes in *The Function of the Orgasm*, repression’s function is “to lay the foundation for an authoritarian, patriarchal culture and economic slavery” (232). Reich “solves” the dialectic of repression by releasing orgone from any societal constraints because regulation is not only unnecessary but unjust. In this sense, Reich argues for de-repression as a mode of revolution.

However for Marcuse, Reich’s ideas are too simplistically binary and do not obviate what he calls Freud’s “fatal dialectic of civilization,” an impasse that has no solution if it is a universal condition of humanity (“Freedom” 18). Marcuse and Watts go one step further than Reich in trying to solve the impasse by locating the problem within the very structure of dialectic thought. If Reich pointed out that repression is a particular manifestation of a particular organization of society, Marcuse and Watts argue that the problem is in the self-understanding of Western modernity. Echoing Max Horkheimer and Theodore Adorno’s critique of Enlightenment rationality, in *Eros and Civilization* Marcuse argues that Western philosophy has been wedded to a binary thought in the service of domination. The foundational act of Western thought was to define Reason as an instrument of constraint and suppression, creating the domain of the instincts and sensuous as antagonistic to Reason and thus something that must be suppressed (159). This basic dualism, what Marcuse calls “the dialectic of domination” of instinct/freedom and logic/constraint, governs the social logic of postwar modernity which sees life as something that must be entirely managed and controlled. Following this, Marcuse comes to a similar conclusion as Foucault: that within the “fatal dialectic of civilization” freedom becomes possible only as liberation. That is, “Liberty *follows* domination— and leads to the reaffirmation of domination” (65). Typical of the Frankfurt School, Marcuse
argues that after Hegel, the mainstream of Western philosophy is exhausted, “the Logos of domination has built its system” in the service of a Reality Principle that demands a similar logics of domination within social administration (118). In other words, the master/slave dialectic which structures thought, relationality and the social, is not a independent fact of Reason but a particular form of Reason that belongs to Western modernity; this dialectic structures the primary logic by which we can contemplate liberation and so has become exhausted because liberation is always circumscribed by domination (114).

Similarly, Watts finds sexual revolution hindered by dualistic thinking, which he believes to be primarily a Western (as opposed to Eastern) instrument of thought. Watts was a British Anglican divinity scholar who moved to California and became a local expert on Zen, Indian and Chinese philosophy. Known for his books popularizing an Americanized Zen philosophy, like *The Way of Zen* (1957) and *Beat Zen, Square Zen and Zen* (1959), Watts joined a group of writers whom Michael Szalay has termed “the White Orientals” (playing on Norman Mailer’s essay “The White Negro”). These writers, such as Kerouac and Snyder, in addition to Huxley and Miller, promoted Westernized versions of Hindu, Buddhist and Tantric thought in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Working within alternative intellectual institutions like Berkeley’s KPFA, religious centers and Esalen, Watts found structural similarities between Freudian Leftism and Zen,

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44 As critics like Hugh Urban and Jeffrey Kripal have argued, these appropriated cultural practices reveal more about Western practitioners than they do about Hindu or Buddhist traditions themselves. Additionally, while Californian writers frequently reference the relative position of California between East and West, the geographical explanation for the interest in Asian thought may be overblown. As Christina Klein argues in *Cold War Orientalism*, between 1941-1965 American military influence in Asia created a widespread interest in Asian culture. In chapter three, I will take up further the issue of the counter-culture’s cultural appropriation.

45 Szalay writes that these alternative intellectual Zen-influenced institutions were central to the formation of a West Coast bohemia: “the study of Zen consolidated a West Coast intellectual élan
frequently engaging Freud, Erich Fromm, Norman O. Brown and R.D. Laing in addition to Marcuse (Szalay 382).

In his spiritual-political books *Nature, Man and Woman* (1958) and *Psychotherapy East and West* (1961), Watts details how Asian non-dualistic forms of thought could form understandings of Eros outside of dialectical tension. He finds that the “problem” of liberation is insoluble because of the way it is posed in a dualistic language of opposition (*Psychotherapy* 99). This opposition recapitulates itself in a dualistic understanding of sexuality as “a fruitlessly alternating dualism” in which desire exists only at the opposite poles of prohibition and liberation: “It would not be unreasonable to regard puritanism, like masochism, as an extreme form of sexual ‘decadence’” (*Nature* 157, 154). Sexuality’s implicated power dynamics of domination/submission mean that puritanism and decadence serve the same social order. Furthermore, the dualism of sexuality abstracts it from the rest of experience: “For when sexuality is set apart from a specially good or specially evil compartment of life it no longer works in full relation to everything else” (*Nature* 157). That is, the dualism of sexuality abstracts desire to its own logical realm that is disconnected from the differential nature of relationships in the world it has left behind.

This ideological limitation of desire reflects the limitations of dualistic thought which cannot easily express more complicated ontological relationships: “But a given language cannot properly express what is implicit in it—the unity of differences, the logical inseparability of light and darkness, Yes and No” (43). Here Watts mirrors Deleuze and Guattari’s observation that Western language has a relative inability to and bucolic simplicity over and against an urban East Coast scene. One salient characteristic of this élan was its pointedly extra-academic dissemination of specialized knowledge” (375).
describe experience outside of binary frame. Yet Watts does not privilege indeterminate flows over dualist order. Rather he works toward a more complex language capable of coding experience differently and capable of expressing the logic of the flow. As it does for a wide-range of twentieth century thinkers (including Foucault, Deleuze and Guattari), the language of erotic desire provides Watts and Marcuse a conceptual language to code power and the social world otherwise. Watts and Marcuse do not see Eros as “non-sense erected as flow,” but as a concept that allows them to ascribe a loose structure to this flow. Their nondualistic understanding of Eros as a universal aim-inhibited attachment that pervades everything from the local to the cosmic not only provides a critique but also a way to construct the social world otherwise. Eros thus contains a rebuke to a social world built upon the binary logic of domination and provides a tool for imagining alternative social logics.

In the place of dualism, Watts articulates an ontology composed of interdependent relationships, “an immense complexity of subtly balanced relationships which, like an endless knot, has no loose end and from which it can be untangled and put in supposed order” (Nature 4). If the world has no completely knowable order outside of historical languages of thought, Watts, like Marcuse, argues that Reason is “a kind of order which appears in the world but is not characteristic of it” (Psychotherapy 27). That is, Western Reason (Marcuse’s logics of domination) does not structure the relationships of entities which comprises experience; it names them in one particular way that privileges certain forms understandings over the multitude of others. The dominance of Western rationality obscures alternative types of relationships that might have emerged or may emerge

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46 Watts tends to blur the lines between Eros as a force and Eros as a metaphor. For Marcuse Eros is almost always a biological or vitalist force.
through experience. Watts proposes a new ontological model he calls the “field pattern” which lies “beneath” the separation of the individual and the world:

In this view the differences of the world are not isolated objects encountering one another in conflict, but expressions of polarity. Opposites and differences have something between them, like two faces of a coin; they do not meet as total strangers. When this relativity of things is seen very strongly, its appropriate affect is love rather than hate or fear. (Psychotherapy 44)

Watts wants to move outside of the dualistic language of opposition in favor of a language of difference. Yet he finds that to oppose differential flows against logical order reinstates the antagonistic opposition he wants to avoid. Instead, Watts carves out a space *between* binary opposites and endless flows of difference, a realm Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick calls *finitely many* ($n>2$) *values*, a realm of thought that moves beyond the binary, but without recourse to an unstructured, infinitely proliferating multitude or flow (Sedgwick 508). That is, there is a space between the “two faces of the coin” where we can code multiple, but not indeterminate, patterns (structures, relations, flows, etc.) from the inter-subjective to the cosmic that comprise the flow of experience. In Watts’ mind, Western language does not repress the flow itself, but it represses the multiple ways this flow can be coded otherwise. The realm between the tyranny of the binary and endless differentiation requires a shift to pattern recognition within the flow which uncovers an order (but not *the* order) within the flow itself. That is, it shifts from a model of Western thought, which places a pattern on experience from above, to a model that recognizes the patterns that emerge from within experience. This requires not an abandonment of order but a reworking of it to create a more malleable and complex language that can describe these multiple logics. Eros provides Marcuse and Watts such a language, a pattern, to recognize the codes that emerge from the relations created by intimate and affective
experience. When applying this to social relationships, Watts mirrors Marcuse’s interest in the dialectic between theory and practice. Both argue that new social logics emerge from the multiple types of relationships created by Eros which are repressed by official logics in order to serve one Reality Principle (capitalist rationality). It is within these logics, formed from the patterns of relationships created by Eros, that Marcuse and Watts hope to find social alternatives.

Despite his frequent reference to the difficulty of finding nondualistic language, Watts follows Marcuse in claiming that the problem of dualism is as much a problem of “social resistance” as it is an intellectual impasse. If dualistic rationality serves a specific type of social order based on the yes-no logic of domination, then both Marcuse and Watts find the task of articulating new logics and languages central to social change. Neither want to negate all order, but rather they wish to negate the rationality of the particular current order in favor of what Marcuse calls “a new reality, with an order of its own, governed by different principles” (Eros 171). This new Reality Principle, what he calls “libidinal rationality” does not emerge from a transcendent order being placed on immanent experience but from the patterns that emerge from immanent experience itself. While Watts finds these alternative pattern-languages in Indian and Chinese philosophy and Marcuse finds them in fantasy and art, both of them privilege Eros for its ability to code relationality and social attachment. The polymorphous, aim-inhibited character of Eros, creating “one out of more than one” in undetermined ways, provides the foundational building block of a new social order that harmonizes the free movement of Eros with structural order. If it were to be fully realized in the social-political world in a speculative “non-repressive culture,” Marcuse believes Eros would tend toward free and
lasting relations which are constrained and regulated by a new Reality Principle which could be based on pleasure and solidarity instead of capitalist production and social control (197). Eros’s aims of pleasure in attachment creates a logics of relationality that does away with the dualism of chaos and order, unreason and reason, because Logos is now harmonized with Eros. Thus “libidinal rationality” as a mode of thought which harmonizes Logos with Eros has the potential to develop a “new” Reality Principle replacing an ethic of work with one of pleasure and transforming the social order from one organized around labor to one organized around freedom and pleasure. Not only do patterns of thought emerge from within experience, but also these patterns direct the values of thought and politics itself. At the same time, freedom and pleasure is still somewhat regulated or constrained because Eros contains its own “inner logic” of attachment. Eros still has a rationality, but a rationality that develops out of Eros itself. Regulation does not come from outside or from a transcendent realm; it is immanent to movements of Eros itself, in the relations it creates as it attaches. In this sense, it is self-regulating; for Marcuse the free play of Eros unleashed will generate “new forms of realization and of discovering the world, which in turn will reshape the realm of necessity, the struggle for existence” (223). That is, Eros could provide not only the relational logics of a new social order but also its self-understanding as a collectivity.

**Erotic Communities**

What would a self-regulating culture, structured by an erotic social logic of attachment (libidinal rationality) look like? I turn here to two popular counter-cultural texts which grapple with this question: Huxley’s utopia in his novel *Island* and Miller’s
description of the Edenic community of artists in 1950s Big Sur in his memoir *Big Sur and the Oranges of Hieronymus Bosch*. In Los Angeles, influenced by spiritual philosopher and occasional Esalen lecturer Gerald Heard, Huxley believed that only radically new mystical and sexual experiences could allow civilization to access the state of consciousness needed to move beyond the political and ecological threats of the twentieth century.\(^{47}\) Heard, in his *Pain, Sex and Time* (1939), critiqued what he saw as the Freudian view of sex as merely “psycho-physical hygiene” to restore the balance of the libido (44). Rather, he saw sex as a source of vital energy, “a rainbow-creating jet” which was being squandered in what he called “trivial eroticism.” He believed that mankind was on the verge of a “psychic evolution” in which sexual energy could be, as he puts it, “the capital to which to build a new order” (52). Without this use of energy to create a new order, “we must oscillate between the *tedium vitae* of sex exhaustion and the frantic destructiveness of the Puritan repression which ends in the monomaniac militarists” (49). Heard’s critique of the Western dualism of desire complemented Huxley’s interest in mystical experience. Following *The Perennial Philosophy* (1944), influenced by Heard’s claim of the deep unity of the world’s religions and *The Doors of Perception* (1954) which details his mystical experiences when taking mescaline, Huxley saw *Island* as a way to explore the social-political aspects of non-dualist theories of sex and mysticism.

\(^{47}\) Heard, along with Huxley and Isherwood were referred to by Watts as “the British Mystical Expatriates of Southern California” (Kripal 86). Like Watts, Gerald was also at one point a member of the Anglican clergy. He also provides an interesting link to later sixties gay liberation. In March 1955 in *ONE*, an early Los Angeles homophile magazine, Heard, under the pseudonym of “D.B. Vest” wrote “A Future for the Isophyl” in which he claims that the bearer of the new sexual mores is the “isophyl” (the homosexual) who because of his nature outside of the societal compulsion to reproduce is able to view sexuality in a new way. So too, the isophyl is a “balanced mixture of the ‘andric’ and ‘gynic’ factors” which “seem to be the endocrine poise which best combines the exploratory urge with the compositional desire. Hence such a type is most likely to arrive at profoundly new insights” (30). Kripal unmasked D.B. Vest as Heard in his book *Esalen*.
The novel details the journey of a Scottish journalist, Will Farnby, who washes up on the fictional island nation of Pala somewhere in the South Pacific. Pala is a utopian laboratory that details how the work of Huxley’s two prior texts can be applied to the planning of a new type of civilization dedicated to the harmony between individual sexual freedom and social form. Founded by a Scottish doctor dedicated to Enlightenment rationality but weary of overpopulation, exploitation and war, Pala was created when the doctor joined with a local mystic, Raja the Reformer, who was dedicated to Mahayana Buddhist ideals. The Scottish doctor’s vision is described as “pure experimental science at one end of the spectrum and pure experimental mysticism at the other” (136). Rather than create an opposition between East and West, Huxley envisions the ways in which Western Enlightenment values of individuality and progress can be better achieved through Eastern styles of life, all while avoiding the authoritarianism of postwar modernity. Instead of seeing sexual mysticism as strictly anti-positivist, Huxley highlights ways sexual instincts and social forms can be harmonized. In their foundational text, *Notes on What’s What and on What It Might be Reasonable to Do About What’s What*, the Palanese echo Watts’ attempt to bypass the “no-yes” logic of sex in their notion of the “blessed experience of Not Two”: “Asceticism or hedonism–systematic exclusions in the realm of sensation, feeling and action” (43). That is, these systematic exclusions turn sexuality into mere “trivial eroticism” as it is in the West. Accordingly in Pala, sexuality is placed at its very center, rather than being abstracted from social life. The Palanese view sexuality through the lens of a prelapsarian

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48 Though the text does not see it that way, this enterprise easily reads as a form of Western colonialism and Orientalism, As Klein argues, the novel's interest in Asian thought and East Asian-European contact is typical of American middle-brow culture in the 1950s and 1960s which placed a progressive view on US Asian military expansion in Asia during the Cold War.
innocence and hold a Spinozist view that encourages a free, self-regulating adult
sexuality and guided child sexual experimentation. Will’s guide Ranga echoes Freud:
“What we’re born with, what we experience all through infancy and childhood, is…a
sexuality diffused throughout the whole organism. That’s the paradise we inherit. But the
paradise gets lost as the child grows up” (90). However, on Pala, this need not be so. To
recapture this sense of paradise, free love is encouraged and taught at age fifteen and
efforts are made to expand sexuality beyond the restrictions of reproduction and
genitality so that it may form the basis of social attachment.

Central to the effort to diffuse sexuality into other aspects of the body and life is
the teaching of maithuna, a Tantric sexual union, traditionally within a ritualized context.
Ranga defines maithuna as the “yoga of love.” When Will asks whether this yoga is
sacred or profane, Ranga tells him that it makes no difference, “When you do maithuna,
profane love is sacred love” (89). The teaching of maithuna and free love is central to the
workings of Palanese society and Huxley’s utopia. The practice allows spirituality to be
democratized (anyone can do maithuna) and to bypass the authorities of scripture or
religious institutions. Because this spiritual practice is conceptualized as an awareness of
divine reality itself, sexuality becomes once again associated with the expression of the
most authentic, innocent and even divine aspects of human nature that connect the subject
to what is outside of it, at points approaching the intense feeling of spiritual
connectedness in Freud’s “oceanic feeling.” Maithuna serves as the basis for the political
organization of Pala where there is a communal non-capitalist economy, communal child

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49 Huxley’s novels mirror Wilhelm Reich’s theories of childhood sexuality and A.S. Neill’s theories
of education through direct experience with limited discipline and control in his progressive British
school Summerhill as detailed in his popular 1960 book Summerhill: A Radical Approach to Child
Rearing. Neil and Reich were friendly and often in agreement until Neil broke with Reich in 1954
over Reich’s belief in extraterrestrials (Turner 11).
rearing and laws to support free love. While much of Farnby’s description of Pala seeks a pre-industrial romanticism of tribal life, the island nation also resembles a modern bureaucratic state, although a modern bureaucratic state built on a different conception of communal attachment. Pala is an alternative to a social organization based on “voluntary association of men and women on the road to full humanity” rather than compulsory membership in a society of domination (211). In this way, Pala attempts to avoid the Western dualism of sexual prohibition, in which desire is opposed to the social, to imagine a nation state structured by desire itself.

Like Huxley, Miller in the 1950s turned to Asian spiritual traditions. At this later point in his life, Miller was still writing his sexually explicit *Rosy Crucifixion Trilogy* (*Sexus, Plexus and Nexus*), yet he also was interested in sexuality as a force of communal attachment rather than a path to personal liberation. Miller’s contact with Asian thought reframed many of his earlier ideas of sex. In his chronicle of his influences, *The Books in My Life* (1969), he cites figures such as Ramakrishna, Lao-tse, and the Buddha. Yet he discovered the most compelling vitalistic connection between spirituality and sexuality within the occult Christian traditions and aesthetic traditions of the West. While Miller saw himself in a Western tradition that looks for ethical models in Tantra, his muse for *Big Sur* was Bosch’s (c 1450-1516) representation of the early Adamite Christian cults in his triptych painting *The Millennium* (1503-04) specifically as filtered through William Fränger’s criticism of the painting. Fränger’s *The Millennium of Hieronymus Bosch* (1951) reevaluated Bosch’s painting within the terms of a spiritualized and vitalized

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50 Interested in each other’s work, but not friendly with each other, Huxley sent Miller a copy of his *Perennial Philosophy* in 1945, which he described as “a doctrine of which the modern world has chosen to be ignorant, preferring radios and four-motored bombers and salvation-through-organization, which the catastrophic consequences that we see all about us” (“Letter” Miller).
sexuality, what Jeffrey Kripal has termed “a Christian Tantra” (38). In this sense, Miller sees a homology between occult Western traditions and Eastern thought, a similar homology that Watts and Huxley find.

Bosch’s painting comprises three parts. On the left most panel is a representation of Biblical Eden with Adam and Eve and on the right most panel a Hell where sinners are being tortured. The center panel, “The Garden of Earthly Delights,” is double the size of the other two and presumably represents earth, although a paradisiacal one. While the central panel’s overflowing of nude lovers is traditionally read as embodying earthly sin, Fränger reinterprets this frame as referencing the conception of early delights in Renaissance Adamite cults. As Fränger describes it:

The roundabout in the middle distance is a turbulent cavalcade, the mounts all proud, potent animals, circling around a pool whose egg-like shape shows it to be the germ-cell and naval of this paradisical [sic] world. Not only the ground, but water and air too are populated by pairs of lovers and erotic communities, which gives the garden of love a cosmic framework and hence a universal religious relevance. The mood prevailing in this Adamite family is one in which unbounded sensual delight and serene chastity hold equal sway. The unity of the centre and the left volet is emphasized by the sharp demarcation of Hell: two homogeneously radiant, clear and harmonious Paradises are contrasted with the gloomy, lurid midnight squalor of the inferno. (9)

Instead of reading the center panel as a depiction of a postlapsarian world, Fränger reads the earthly realm as a continuation of Biblical paradise which is destroyed in the final panel; only if one finds the center panel sinful, he reasons, can it be considered a fallen paradise. Miller’s memoir draws a parallel between the paradisiacal Big Sur and the painting’s center panel; “Bosch is one of the very few painters...who acquired a magic vision. He saw through the phenomenal world, rendered it transparent, and thus revealed
its pristine aspect” (22). Miller finds in Bosch’s painting a model of the natural world as inherently innocent, “revealed” in its “pristine aspect,” highlighting the innate order, beauty and harmony of Edenic nature. For Miller, to live in harmony with the natural world is to join “blissfully to the eternal flux, [floating] ecstatically on the still current of life” (Big Sur 29). Fränger’s interpretation of the painting, which reconciles spirituality with sensuality and sexuality, locates the spiritual in the same world as self-regulating pleasures; the harmony of contradictions comprises the spiritual. In a passage Miller quotes at length in Big Sur, Fränger describes the figures in the middle panel as growing up from the ground as random as wild flowers:

> From the vague uniformity of this naked life is not subject to any formal discipline. Yet however arbitrary the pattern of the moving bodies may be concentrated and condensed in one place and may loosen and scatter in another, there is nowhere any overcrowding and nowhere any random emptiness. However free each may be to follow his own inclination, there remains an invisible bond holding them all together. This is the tenderness with which all these inhabitants of the heavenly meadows cling together in brotherly and sisterly intimacy. (Big Sur 127)

The passage describes a reconciliation of dialectical tension between the endless multiplicity of individual autonomy and strict social organization. It implies a faith that humans could exist in complex self-regulating social systems. While this self-regulation appears random and chaotic, the individuals are connected by the “invisible bond” of love as a constraint internal to Eros. It is not imposed by some social or moral entity against the individual; constraint is within the desire to cling together tenderly. That is, the social organization mirrors not the chaos of desire, but the logic of desire out of which non-

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51 Kripal argues that Bosch’s painting and Fränger’s criticism was important to many around Esalen (38-40).
hierarchical “brotherly” and “sisterly” intimacies develop among many potential, but not infinitely multiple, intimacies.\(^{52}\)

Miller echoes this model in his conception of his own erotic community which focuses on an even larger spiritual sense of attachment; members are connected to each other by nothing other than a feeling of cosmic connection:

The ideal community, in a sense, would be the loose, fluid aggregation of individuals who elected to be alone and detached in order to be at one with themselves and all that lives and breathes. It would be a God-filled community, even if none of its members believed in [a] God. It would be a paradise, even though the word had long disappeared from our vocabulary. (34)

Fränger’s and Miller’s description of the ideal community is one that attempts to reconcile the Freudian dialectic of civilization by organizing around loose forms of attachment that Eros can provide; similar to Huxley’s Pala, social organization develops out of the forms of attachment individuals create. Yet while Huxley’s Pala needs a governing body to create order, Miller is satisfied enough by the social order that is created by an elective model of attachment found in Eros.

Miller and Huxley do not provide utopias of complete liberation. Rather they attempt to evade the “fatal dialectic of civilization” by arguing for an alternative conception of harmony between instinct and civilization that will develop its own social patterns. The promise of sexual revolution for each is not about overthrowing the current social order in the name of “liberation” but in opening up possibilities for alternative social forms in which sexuality would not be a matter of liberation. These alternative logics find a language in both art and sexuality, both associated with mysterious logics of their own that can serve as modes of thought to understand alternative social logics of sex

\(^{52}\) Miller finds these “brotherly” and “sisterly” intimacies to be non-hierarchical. However, Miller pays no attention to the hierarchy between “brother” and “sister,” nor to the Oedipal hierarchy in which they are presumably enmeshed.
and power. In *Sexus* (1949), Miller writes: “Through art, then, one finally establishes contact with reality: that is the great discovery… The world has not to be put in order: the world is order incarnate. It is for us to put ourselves in unison with this order, to know what is the world order in contradiction to the wishful-thinking orders which seek to impose on one another” (213). Here Miller assigns to art the task of developing new conceptual models not of experience but from within the order of experience. The task of the artist, like that of Watts’ pattern recognizer and Marcuse’s theorist is not to estrange man from reality. Rather man has already been estranged from reality, living in a world of illusion and must be brought to see the “real” world. And as he writes in *The World of Sex*, the artist’s job is to be a kind of sexual explorer, articulating aspects of alternative social logic: “Let us put it this way— that I have charted certain islands which may serve as stepping stones when the great routes are opened up” (21). Miller, understanding that a sexual revolution is underway, articulates what “new orders” of humankind can arise from the freeing up of prohibitions on sexual autonomy and the promise of its self-regulation, its pressing of Logos into the service of Eros.

**Trouble in Paradise**

How might these “new routes” be opened up? For Miller the answer is that the artist is able to uncover the divinity and transcendence within the sexual experience and order it through art. The novel *Sexus* parallels the protagonist Val’s sexual awakening with his artistic and political awakening, aligning creative energy and sexual energy, both which derive from the same vitalist force. After having had sex several times in one day, Val thinking himself spent, both sexually and artistically, finds himself having another
sexual encounter in which he discovers that he is able to summon an infinite source of energy:

Always, when one digs down into the reservoir, when one summons the last ounce, so to speak, one is amazed to discover that there is a boundless source of energy to be drawn on. It happened to me before, but I had never given it serious attention....This was the sort of ebullience and elan I prayed for when I felt the desire to write (243).

Here when describing actual intimate encounters, as opposed to social collectivities based on intimate attachment, Miller revises Freud’s and Reich’s economic view of libidinal energy. Val is not worried about whether vital energies are sublimated into trivial erotic pursuits; rather he finds that there is a specific mode of being in sex which is attuned to this energy source through the free play of sex and creativity. This free play allows Val to access a deep cosmic source of energy, the “current of life” (338). Yet as we see in this characteristic passage, Miller’s description of sexual pleasure repeats a dualism of subject/object that is really a dualism of masculinity/femininity. In Miller’s mind, the artist-lover in sex becomes a discoverer (and in some places a conquerer or master) who through his female partner accesses the flow of experience.

Though Kate Millet’s groundbreaking *Sexual Politics* (1970) is itself a crucial node in the “rich moment” of anti-repressive thought I am outlining in this dissertation, K. Millet critiques the inescapable heterosexist worldview of H. Miller’s self-regulating erotic community. In K. Millet’s mind, H. Miller’s sexual freedom is merely a cover for

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53 Norman Mailer rushed to Miller’s defense in a 1971 essay for *Harpers*, “The Prisoner of Sex” where he mocks radical feminist critiques of sexual freedom. Mailer, whose work was also critiqued in *Sexual Politics*, argues that men have an instinctual connection to reunite themselves with experience in sexual penetration: “...for man is alienated from the nature which brought him forth, he is not like woman in the possession of an inner space which gives her link to the future, so he must drive to possess it, he must if necessary come close to blowing his head off that he
the exploitation of women: “Even the orgies which Miller presents to us as lessons in a free and happy sensuality, far removed from the constraints of American puritanism, are really only authoritarian arrangements where male will is given absolute license” (305). As most readers of Tropic of Cancer would agree, while H. Miller attempts to bypass the constraints of yes-no logic of repression in the social world, he cannot conceive of sexual pleasure outside of the play of domination and submission. In H. Miller’s work, freedom from social prohibition becomes a reconciliation of instinct and civilization, but it does not obviate the more fundamental dialectic of male/female. In K. Millet’s view, he has only attacked a symptom of this logic, not its more foundational dualism. In this respect, K. Millet’s critique aligns with those who often feared that the self-regulating ethics of sexual liberation were merely a justification for hedonistic permissiveness, “the holiness of the personal impulse” dressed up in pseudo-spiritual tradition, as one liberal critic put it (Ciardi 255).

Yet while she criticizes H. Miller’s misogyny, K. Millet similarly believes that “Sex is at the heart of our troubles” and that patriarchy’s binary sexual power dynamics are “the most pernicious of our systems of oppression” (22). If the gender binary is the root structure of domination, then H. Miller’s erotic community can be critiqued for mirroring and substantiating patriarchal desire as natural “self-regulating” sexuality. The problem with his erotic community is that H. Miller assumes he has created a true alternative to the contemporary social order when he merely reflects that order while claiming to have abolished it. As K. Millet notes, “coitus can scarcely be said to take place in a vacuum” because it is “so deeply embedded in the larger context of human

may posses it” (65). This passage is characteristic of how Mailer sorely misses Millet’s argument in the essay.
affairs that it serves as a charged microcosm of the variety of attitudes and values to which culture subscribes” (23). H. Miller’s mistake is to believe he has been liberated from prohibition and even binary logic itself, when in fact his utopia has substantiated it at an even more fundamental level.\(^{54}\)

Millet was not the only one concerned that thrill of liberation could easily mask exploitation by posing as self-regulation. In his 1964 *One-Dimension Man* Marcuse termed the false promise of liberation through sex “repressive desublimation,” a release of pleasure that is easily absorbed by the rationality of domination. While *Eros and Civilization* found in Eros a potential for an alternative logics, by 1964 Marcuse thought sexuality no longer had any alternative character. It had already been rationalized and integrated into the one-dimension whole: “This society turns everything it touches into a potential source of progress and of exploitation, of drudgery and satisfaction, of freedom and oppression. Sexuality is no exception” (78).\(^{55}\) But Marucse is not only concerned that sexuality could be easily absorbed. Individual pleasure could easily overtake attachment, particularly within a culture in which all forms of attachment have been de-eroticized and subject to capitalist-rationalist logic. Even in *Eros and Civilization*, Marcuse recognized that his work could be misinterpreted as leading to “a society of sex maniacs–that is, to

\(^{54}\) We could also point out the patriarchal and heteronormative assumptions in Marcuse’s work. While early radical feminists found Marcuse’s work crucial, later feminist readers such as Nancy Chodorow and Jessica Benjamin have pointed out his elision of the discussion of childbirth as labor and attempted to reframe Marcuse’s theory from a feminist perspective. For an account of the feminist revision of Marcuse’s work, see Gad Horowitz’s essay “Psychoanalytic Feminism in the Wake of Marcuse.”

\(^{55}\) In a 1963 lecture “The Obsolescence of the Freudian Concept of Man” Marcuse explains much of his shift away from Eros as a realm of resistance. In the lecture, Marcuse argues that the Freudian conception of social attachment has become outdated. If psychic logic is related to historical, social and political conditions, then the one-dimension society needs a new understanding of the human mind as reflecting the atomization of contemporary society. Marcuse dispenses with the psychic Freudian model, but remains committed to the link between the psyche and the social. In this sense, he seeks to provide a historicism of the psyche, and by extension, desire.
no society” (201). Toward the end of his life, even Reich became haunted by the idea that his theories would unleash nothing more than, as he puts it, a “free-for-all fucking epidemic” (Reich Murder 94). Similarly, Watts understood self-regulating erotic communities to be illegible or misinterpreted by a Puritanical culture that could view sexuality only in terms of dualism and which refuses to recognize that all social love is erotic. Watts admits that under this frame, a self-regulating, libidinal rationality could easily be read as “something slimy, lustful, fawning, and obscene” (Psychotherapy 180). Instead of a “erotic fellowship with others,” the dualistic mind conceives “collective sexual orgy” (Psychotherapy 180). Under a dualistic frame, liberation can only end in the anarchy of an orgy where liberation is defined as the liberation from attachment rather than the ability to experience other connections with others. What then might be the unintended effects of a sexual revolution which presents self-regulation to a culture that can only view self-regulation as the absence of social constraint?

If a self-regulating erotic social order is not a utopian fantasy, if it is real historical possibility as these writers believe it is, then it must emerge within the historical necessities of postwar American culture which can easily jettison any social attachments or responsibility in the name of liberation. This anxiety is expressed in both Miller’s and Huxley’s utopias in the form of child sexual exploitation. As James Kincaid has argued, the figure of the child as simultaneously innocent and sexual was at the center of American anxieties about sexual liberation. This is particularly true in texts like Miller’s and Huxley’s and also in Kerouac’s novel Big Sur (1962).56 While Huxley’s novel

56 Kerouac’s auto-biographical novel explores a romantic return to the childhood innocence of nature through its main character Dulouz, who lives in a cabin in rural Big Sur as he tries to sober up. Yet despite the fascination with childhood innocence, the novel contains several scenes of child sexual exploitation by adults. In one representative scene, Dulouz sleeps with his girlfriend
explores the ability of children to self-regulate their sexuality, both his and Miller’s texts are less certain about whether adults can self-regulate. If these writers conceive of self-regulation as a crucial aspect of their utopias, they reflect Marcuse’s and Watts’ concerns over whether the ethos of self-regulation can be translated beyond their narrow utopias to a wider audience without promoting a hedonistic permissiveness or repressive desublimation that sanctions exploitation.

If the first two sections of Miller’s *Big Sur* detail the libidinal utopia he has found in Big Sur, the third section, “Paradise Lost,” details the story of the Swiss astrologer and writer, Conrad Moricand, who comes to stay with Miller in 1948. Moricand’s tale threatens to undo this paradise and indeed the defense of a self-regulating society in the earlier parts of the book. Moricand, whom Miller met through Anaïs Nin during his Villa Seurat days, is identified with the decaying Western civilization of Europe. Moricand’s sickly demeanor is presented in striking opposition to Miller’s bodily health and robustness. The only thing that seems to animate Moricand is his perverse sexual interest in children. In seeing Moricand’s drawings, Miller writes:

> It was my first view of his work. I must confess the drawings left a bad taste in my mouth. They were perverse, sadistic, sacrilegious. Children being raped by lubricious monsters, virgins practicing all manner of illicit intercourse, nuns defiling themselves with sacred objects. . . flagellations, medieval tortures, while her toddler watches. Experiencing *delirium tremens*, Dulouz believes that the excessive hedonism is part of a plot to drive him to madness:

> The little child refuses to sleep in his crib but to come trotting out and watch us make love on the bed but Billie says “That’s good, he’ll learn, what other way will he ever learn?” —I feel ashamed but because Billie is there and she’s the mother I must go along and not worry—Another sinister fact—At one point the child is drooling long slavers of spit from his lips watching, I cry “Billie, look at him, it’s not good for him” but she says again “Anything he wants he can have, *even us*.” (157)

For Kerouac, the scene epitomizes a major theme of his novel— for Dulouz, libidinal de-regulation has dangerously exceeded all responsible limits. Dulouz’s terror over such scenes is part of the reason he turns away from Buddhism toward Catholicism with its more clear moral structure.
dismemberments, coprophagic orgies, and so forth. All done with a delicate, sensitive hand, which only magnified the disgusting element of the subject matter. (337)

Part of Miller’s horror is that Moricand seems to have taken Miller’s ideas about sexual permissiveness and self-regulation seriously. The detail of Moricand’s “delicate, sensitive hand” demonstrates an interest in his own art and an interest in the range of human experience. Indeed, many of the things in his drawings—the virgins, the nuns, the illicit intercourse—are some of the elements that Miller praises in Bosch’s “The Garden of Earthly Delights.” The crucial difference, however, is that while Bosch’s painting for Miller and Fränger exists to serve an ideal of self-regulation, Moricand’s drawing delights in the illicit sexuality that dogma produces. Obscenity and titillation are not in the service of sexual freedom but instead reveal how sexual inhibition creates the very conditions of sexual depravity. And yet, perhaps unintentionally, this encounter raises the question of how he himself could tell the difference between the two types of sexual freedom, the truly liberated and the merely hedonistic? Or more precisely, by promoting sexual freedom in this work and his entire career, has Miller opened the door to a type of hedonistic sexuality that now horrifies him?

The confusion over these two types of sexual experience develops further when Moricand tells Miller of his affair with a young French girl “of eight or nine.” When he begins to tell a story about following a young woman and her daughter in Paris, Miller sees Moricand more “alive” than usual, which elicits Miller’s own excitement: “It’s the sudden inner excitement which his looks and gestures betray that takes hold of me, rivets my attention” (360). Miller’s attention is piqued at first because he believes that
Moricand is telling him about the sexual conquest of the mother. Yet it soon becomes clear that Moricand is telling him about the sexual relationship with the daughter:

> It was almost painful to hear him rhapsodize about the little girl. What was it about her that so excited him? The look of the perverted angel!
> His words were so graphic, so diabolically searching, that despite myself, I was ready to believe that the child was steeped in vice. Or else so innocent that... The thought of what was passing through his mind made me shudder. (362)

At first Miller thinks that Moricand is attracted to the girl because of her vice. Yet he is even more horrified to learn that it is the peculiar combination of the child’s innocence and the child’s budding sexuality that attracts Moricand, describing her with the paradoxical phrase, “perverted angel,” as well as “or else so innocent that....” Left unsaid could be several things, but most likely Moricand is attracted to the girl because he sees an opportunity to destroy her innocence. Miller is horrified by his friend’s actions because Moricand views childhood as an opportunity for perversion, corruption, and the destruction of innocence. For Miller, the crime of seducing a child may pale in comparison to willfully destroying this innocence.57

While Miller explicitly renders sexual exploitation in his text, the implicit eroticizing of children in Island demonstrates Huxley’s ambivalence toward the spread of sexual liberalization and his anxiety over the distinction between sexual freedom and hedonism. In Huxley’s utopian vision of free love, individuals enter into free relations with others and are self-regulating in their desire. Thus there are few sexual restrictions on Pala besides the overtly exploitative. And yet while free love may lead to individual freedom, creativity and happiness, the text raises concerns about the unintended consequences of greater permissiveness. Huxley believes that in a free sexual culture, like

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57 We could raise the question here: If Miller is so concerned with childhood sexual exploitation, why is he not concerned with the exploitation of women?
Pala, hedonism would disappear because desire would no longer be structured by imposed morality (43). When, as in Pala, sex is viewed as essentially good, then there is no reason for such forms of sexual “decadence” and “titillation”; asceticism and hedonism are similar for Huxley in that they both view sex through the satisfaction of discipline or the thrill of liberation.

Yet Will, who arrives on Pala with a typically uptight British sexual morality, when unexpectedly given license to self-regulate his desire, discovers that it mostly revolves around the type of trivial eroticism Huxley eschews. Several times throughout the text, Will finds himself attracted to the youth of Pala. When he first encounters the wayward teenage prince Murugan who is colluding with Western powers to colonize Pala, Will thinks:

What a delicious creature!…That smooth golden torso, that averted face, regular as a statue but no longer Olympian, no longer classical—a Hellenistic face, mobile and all too human. A vessel of incomparable beauty—but what did it contain? …By the sort of heterosexual he was, the sort of rational question he was now posing was unaskable. As no doubt it would be, by anyone susceptible to boys, in regard to this bad-blooded little demigod sitting at the end of his bed. (44)

Will, up until now identified as heterosexual, is captured by Murugan’s physical beauty and driven to reconsider his thoughts about his own sexuality, to ask the “unaskable” question, as he puts it. Here we see a potential breakdown in Will’s ability to self-regulate his desires, that is, to satisfy his desire while not taking advantage of Murugan. While Huxley approves of homosexuality in his utopia, Will’s sexual awakening brings him dangerously close to the non-liberatory hedonism represented by Murugan and his scheme to colonize and “modernize” Pala. Murugan is not only seductive for his looks, but because he represents a link with the outside world. Will finds that eroticism leads
him dangerously close to a scheme that threatens the utopia that makes self-regulation possible.

Toward the end of his trip, when he visits the school on the island, Will finds himself once again lost in the beauty of youth. He describes the children:

    The bent heads were sleek and dark…the golden bodies glistened in the heat. Boys’ bodies that showed the cage of the ribs beneath the skin, girls’ bodies, fuller, smoother, with the swell of small breasts, firm high-set, elegant as the inventions of a rococo sculptor of nymphs…What a comfort Will reflected, to be in a place where the Fall was an exploded doctrine! (262-63)

Will associates the bodies of the students—beautiful, youthful and dark—with the vital energy of a prelapsarian innocence. Here are the authentic human beings that Will has been searching for. These children, for Will, are among those who are most uncorrupted by the sexual restrictions of Western morality, but paradoxically are the most tempting of objects. While they themselves may remain the self-regulating utopian citizens doing maithuna that Huxley imagines, this utopian nation, although an island, is consistently threatened from outside influence. While Huxley wants to translate his utopia to the rest of the world in a grand vision of East and West, he realizes that this vision must be translated through figures like Will, who, dissatisfied with their own cultures, look for outside models. And yet, when Will washes up on the shores of Pala and is suddenly and unexpectedly allowed the freedom to self-regulate his own desires, he becomes overtaken by a type of trivial eroticism that borders on exploitation.

Similarly, the tale of Moricand, coming at the end of the Big Sur, underscores Miller’s belief in primal innocence and those such as Moricand who would destroy it. With the greater permissiveness that Miller is promoting, can those like Moricand be trusted with this newfound freedom? By ending with Moricand’s story, Miller calls his
entire project into question at the moment he arrives at the culmination of his defense of authentic innocence by rebuking Moricand. Miller’s epilogue does not answer these questions or comment on them in any sustained way. After the tale, Miller quickly ends his book by reiterating his ideas about Big Sur as a paradise and artistic retreat from the world with a hope that the encroaching civilization does not ruin it. In this respect, Moricand’s tale seems to be a warning that the outside world can destroy not just the natural beauty of Big Sur but also many of the self-regulating philosophies that structure its utopian character. Such an ending does not so much resolve the tension between the values of the Big Sur bohemia and the values of the America which surrounds it as it mirrors a larger cultural anxiety over the effects of sexual self-regulation. In both of these self-regulating paradise, the problem of exploitation comes in its contact with contemporary historical conditions. Miller and Huxley betray their own assertions of self-regulation by demonstrating a deep pessimism about the liberation narrative itself in which self-regulation is seen merely as liberation from social constraint, not as an alternative set of constraints. Even the very term sexual revolution (or sexual liberation) recapitulates the before and after narrative of the repressive hypothesis. Despite their effort to shift this narrative, Miller and Huxley cannot prevent historical conditions from crashing into their texts and threatening to exploit their self-regulating erotic communities.

The Ingression of Liberty Into Historical Necessity

Indeed, much of the last section expresses Miller’s annoyance with fans whose letters he must answer. Long sections discussing his mail and the relative absence of sex are some of the reasons this remains one of the least read of Miller’s books.
Marcuse and Watts, however, do not think libidinal rationality is merely utopian, though they understand the perils of a suddenly liberated Eros. Rather, they locate the source of this conflict within the binary understanding of the before/after logic of revolutionary social change. As such, they believe that a social structure governed by libidinal rationality is an actual historical possibility but only insofar as it emerges from within the current social structure. For them, social change is not a matter of the either/or and before/after endemic to utopian thought. Rather they ask how contradictions within one-dimensional society can lead to alternative social forms based on erotic forms of attachment. Unlike Huxley’s and Miller’s utopias, libidinal rationality is a goal for social progress, not a program for it.

Marcuse, similar to Foucault, finds that if liberation is conceived as a release of suppressed libidinal freedom, then historical change must be thought of as occurring through a series of ruptures—a before of repression and an after of liberation. However, this dialectical narrative of oppression and liberation as rupture is part and parcel of a one-dimensional society in which liberation no longer has the power of true negation. Each new “liberation” reinstates the structuring dialectic of dominance. In discussing repressive desublimation through cultural products of the sexual revolution (Lolita, Streetcar Named Desire, Cat on a Hot Tin Roof), Marcuse argues that these texts are not part of a “Great Refusal” of one-dimension society but rather: “Part and parcel of the society in which it happens, but nowhere its negation. What happens is surely wild and obscene, virile and tasty, quite immoral—and, precisely because of that, perfectly

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Marcuse insisted that he did not believe in utopian thought. In a 1967 lecture “The End of Utopia,” he expresses: “Utopia is a historical concept. It refers to projects for social change that are considered impossible. Impossible for what reasons?” (63). Marcuse only believed in utopia if it contradicted the law of nature; since libidinal rationality is harmonized with nature, Marcuse believes it a real historical possibility.
harmless” (77). The very narrative of liberation is stuck within the logic of domination in which liberation is not only accepted, but encouraged. Instead, Marcuse argues that what is needed is not a release of the libido but a transformation in the meaning and purpose of libido: “from sexuality constrained under genital supremacy to the eroticization of the entire personality” (*Eros* 201). Marcuse here moves to a gradational metaphor: “It is a spread rather than explosion of the libido, a spread over private and societal relations which bridges the gap maintained between them by a repressive Reality Principle” (*Eros* 201). That is, sexual revolution opens up the historical possibilities for a new political role for the libido. An expanded Eros emerges from within the relational contradictions of the Reality Principle. And it offers a way to structure social logics away from a Reality Principle which denies Eros’s drive for gratification in order to limit alliances that may threaten its domination.

Thus a self-regulating libidinal utopia structured by libidinal rationality has not arrived with the sexual revolution; rather, it opens up new contradictions with new historical possibilities. Such historical possibilities (as opposed to utopias) emerge through a transformation of the libido that develops out of the movements of Eros in negotiation with historical conditions. Historical possibility is thus somewhat open-ended, but because it arises out of “the ingression of liberty into historical necessity,” it does not make a complete break with historical circumstances (*One* 221). Libidinal rationality does not allow an infinite proliferation of undefined possibility because it is bound by historical necessity (and also by Eros’ relational logics of attachments). It is limited in this way, but by no means does Marcuse think this is a limitation to political thought. It is theory’s task to isolate specific moments of transformation that can “bridge
the gap” between the present and a future whose Reality Principle is governed by libidinal rationality. Even within the dialectical theory of revolution, the possible depends on the actual, and Marcuse highlights, “continuity is preserved through rupture” (*Eros* 221). Typical of New Left thought, the critical dialectical tension for Marcuse is not between classes; it is between *is* and *ought*. Politics is the interplay between the structuring modes of thought that organize society and what modes of thought could organize society differently.

Similarly, Watts highlights continuity in a way that forces him to abandon a simplistic dialectic form of historical change. Liberation is not a “release” of Eros, but a release from the cycle of prohibition and liberation. A release from such a cycle would see how all social forms contain Eros and necessitate an “ethics of Eros” which would be based on reciprocal constraint “what we would like to do and have done to us” (*Psychotherapy* 174). Watts presents ethics through the metaphor of a language and emphasizes the continuity that exists through its tradition. He argues that one must respect tradition not because it is sacrosanct but because it is the way one communicates with others: “If I wish to make an innovation in language acceptable, I must point out its meaning in the terms and context of language as it already exists, for a completely abrupt change will not be understood” (*Psychotherapy* 175). Similarly, a new erotic ethics of attachment must arise through the necessary historical structures. They must be simultaneously a rupture and a continuation if they are to have any social relevance. Watts believes that ethics could no longer come from dogma from a “freely developing pattern which is nevertheless consistent with itself, like the development of a living language” (176). By using the linguistic metaphor, Watts’ movement outside of the
binary does not lead to an infinite play of forces and influence; rather new and different patterns emerge from within the constraints of tradition itself. Similar to language, many different patterns can emerge from the same system of constraints, some which may even point to overturning the most significant of these constraints.

Marcuse finds that historical circumstances require a revision of the dialectic itself away from its fixation on the tension between its binaries toward a dialectical tension between what is and what might be otherwise. Marcuse's Great Refusal, “the refusal of what is,” is not to negate by opposition (as it is read by Foucault) but to imagine otherwise by refusing the logic of domination (*One* 63). In this respect, because there is no “outside” to one-dimensional society, to refuse against what *is* necessitates imagining an *ought* which can only arise out of the internal contradictions of one-dimensional society. Thus refusal is not entirely a negative act; it is an act of creation of new modes of thought and social forms from historical possibilities. Imagining otherwise, the act of negation, has traditionally been the task of the proletariat or those on the outside of society. However the task of negation is dispersed within one-dimensional society where populations are both individuated and conformed by automatization. Furthermore, because one-dimensional society structures our very fantasies of escape and because it has eliminated any outside, imagining otherwise must come from within but nonetheless create a different order. Marcuse believes that an “instinctual revolt” against domination is one of these contradictions which one-dimensional society cannot completely eliminate though it tries to through repressive desublimation. In *One-

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60 This is why Marcuse’s work puts as much emphasis on art and fantasy as it does on Eros. For him, they are realms within society, but least rationalized by the logic of domination, with potential logics of play all of their own.
**Dimensional Man**, Marcuse explains how new modes of thought can emerge from these contradictions within one-dimensional society:

Consequently, thought is lead, by the situation of its objects, to measure their truth in terms of another logic, another universe of discourse. And this logic projects another mode of existence: the realization of truth in the words and deeds of man. And inasmuch as this project involves man as ‘social animal,’ the *polis*, the movement of thought has a political content. (133-34)

Here Marcuse explains how thought itself is linked to social formation. If one form of thought leads to the organization of one-dimensional society, then another order of logic can present a different ordering of the social field. Arising out of the contradictions of one-dimensional society, “another universe of discourse” might provide another “mode of existence”–a different logic and a different social form that opposes the governing logic of one-dimensional society (133).

In response to a question after a 1967 lecture, “The End of Utopia,” Marcuse was asked whether he thought the “British Pop movement” was a model for the “aesthetic-erotic way of life” he had discussed. Instead of dismissing it, Marcuse takes the question seriously and explains that they “herald” a break in the thinking that dominates the “repressive society.” Yet at the same time, Marcuse hesitates assigning them too much importance in that they are just a “state of disintegration within the system.” They will only be able to have any revolutionary force in their potential to “play a role in connection with other, much stronger objective forces” (69). That is, Marcuse’s task for theory is to understand these patterns of forces, to name and track how they momentarily subvert the social logic before they are integrated into the whole. In a society dominated by one form of thinking, theory must articulate the contradictions, the disturbances in the
system, and to ask how they might unite with each other to form a true opposition, not merely a negation, to the status quo.

If one tracks Marcuse’s work from the 1950s-1970s one is struck how by often he finds potentials for opposition in these “disturbances in the system.” Through his work, he entertains the possibility for opposition in various counter-cultural movements and within the Civil Rights and Black Power movements (typically of the New Left, he does not find the working class capable of providing opposition). Yet in subsequent works, he often backtracks on these potentials, finding that a certain group or cultural movement has been so integrated or neutralized that it no longer has the potential for effective negation. This perhaps explains why Marcuse finds such promise in Eros as a form of attachment—it may be the best potential for an opposition that could emerge within the disturbances of rapidly expanding social system bent on total domination over social life.

Love exists as a contradiction within one-dimensional society; the modes of production authorize only certain types of relations and relational logics, but new ones cannot help but emerge. Articulating these can lead to new sources of solidarity whose political goals derive from their very constitution. Typically Marxist, Marcuse cannot conceive of social change occurring without a force of opposition that can rival one-dimensional society. And forces of opposition must have a sense of solidarity. But what does solidarity mean within one-dimensional society? This question is at the heart of the cultural politics of the sixties. If class-based solidarity like economic class and race have been neutralized by one-dimensional society, then Marcuse cannot quite shake Eros or banish it to utopia because it may be the only discernible way left of understanding
social-political attachment. Solidarity does not need be rife with sex, but it must be composed of voluntary, egalitarian and self-propelled attachments which provide a logic and a politics all their own. This is something most people in the sixties simply called love, but it was anything but simple.

61 Though *One-Dimensional Man* is easily read as Marcuse turning his back on Eros, it is better read as Marcuse turning his back on the Freudian conception of the psyche. In *Essay of Liberation* (1969) he returns to Eros outside of a Freudian model and employs a biological model to argue for an “instinctual foundation for solidarity” (10). Marcuse believes that such an instinctual foundation is a type of “biological socialism.”
Chapter Two: The Irreducible Strangeness of Pleasure and The Perceptible Hazards of Love in Pynchon’s Sixties Writing

“Masturbation
Can be fun
Join the holy orgy
Kama Sutra
Everyone!”
- “Sodomy,” Hair (1968)

Popular portrayals of sexual revolution like the rock-musical Hair mirror sixties theory’s and literature’s linking of sex with non-rationalized experiential modes like mysticism, spirituality and aesthetics. In these representations, pleasure gestures toward a realm “outside” or distinct from the social world; as such, pleasure is figured as impenetrable to rational understanding. Because of its ability to elude rational understanding, sexual pleasure offers opportunities of escape from a rationalized and controlled society. In this view, pleasure is not so much “repressed” by rationality as it is a symptom of rationality’s failure at totalization. In Hair’s song “Sodomy,” we are called to experience this pleasure and reminded that masturbation never fails to happen and an orgy could happen at any time. They are not things “outside” of society; masturbation and holy orgies exist as contradictions within social structures. And yet they also have potential to offer the path to the Age of Aquarius in “magical crystal revelation” and the “mind’s true liberation.” As a contradiction internal to society, pleasure is described as both within and outside; the seeds for the new age exist in the current age. Pleasure, regulated and circumscribed as it is, is never fully controlled; it always eludes rational control and thus to fully embrace pleasure in the “holy orgy of everyone” is to find true liberation from the present.
In Part One of this chapter, I argue that in Thomas Pynchon’s sixties novels *The Crying of Lot 49* (1966) and *Gravity’s Rainbow* (1973) sexual pleasure is most often expressed as an “irreducible strangeness,” a force or set of forces that cannot easily be tracked, empirically proven or fully controlled. The System’s inability to fully rationalize and control pleasure demonstrates a profound weakness in rational systems. While Marcuse and others predicate their theories on an integrated, totalizing “System,” Pynchon’s novels, with their bumbling civil servants and dysfunctional bureaucracies, present rational systems of power as absurdly ineffective. While rational systems naively and hubristically attempt to control totality, they are mostly frustrated by what Pynchon calls “the order of the other side,” a pervasive otherness outside of rational understanding. In Pynchon’s sixties novels, pleasure’s ability to elude control frustrates the systemic desire for control and opens up potentials for freedom. But for Pynchon it does not follow that these potentials are necessarily liberatory or progressive.

Many countercultural theorists, most notably classicist-mystic philosopher Norman O. Brown, prize the radical potential of submission to the irrational otherness of pleasure. However, Pynchon finds that to submit to irrational forces can be dangerous, violent and exploitative. For Pynchon there is no direct relationship between radical libidinal liberation and freedom; pleasure can bring freedom and life, but it can just as easily bring oppression and death. In my reading, the Rocket in *Gravity’s Rainbow* does

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62 I follow Pynchon critic David Cowart’s lead in examining *Gravity’s Rainbow* and *The Crying of Lot 49* through a sixties lens rather than a postmodern one.

63 Brown was a life long friend of Marcuse, who supervised his work in the Office of Special Services during World War II. Theodore Roszak in *Making of the Counterculture* (1969) calls the emergence of Marcuse and Brown as major social theorists as “one of the defining features of the counterculture” (84).
not represent the triumph of technological rationality as it is sometimes read.\(^{64}\) Rather it is the totem of an ideal unbridled affirmation of pleasure which embraces a submission to and ethical embrace of the order of the other side. The Rocket is not altogether distinct from the hope for a new age in *Hair*, a mystical revelation or holy orgy where all contradictions are affirmed into what Brown calls “a final unity.” In this respect, Pynchon provides a warning to the counterculture that it may have just as much to fear from pleasure’s liberation as it does from its control.

Given pleasure’s ambivalent role in *Gravity’s Rainbow*, in Part Two, I examine the array of erotic communities that emerge out of the anarchic post-war Zone, where “all categories have been blurred badly” (308). In the Zone, which is regulated by a “bureaucracy of mass absence,” populations experience unforetold liberation from political, social and moral regulation of pleasure (308). We can view the Zone as a type of laboratory of sorts for the types of relationships and social forms that could emerge in a process of radical liberation. Yet the erotic assemblages that Pynchon presents in the novel are distinct from Henry Miller’s and Aldous Huxley’s erotic communities. In fact, they barely cohere as communities at all. Rather these erotic assemblages are all built around their members’ identification with a powerful totem like the Rocket. In this sense, while individuals are free to make their own attachments, there is little intra-group bonding. These groups exist as self-aware entities only through their members’ adherence to a transcendent ideal, which in Pynchon’s mind, makes them not much different than fascist state power. Unlike Miller’s or Huxley’s utopias, the absence of communal attachment means that they cannot be self-regulating; hedonism and sexual exploitation

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\(^{64}\) This is particularly true of the early criticism from George Levine, Richard Poirier and Lawrence Wolfley. However recent criticism from Molly Hite also makes a similar claim.
are rampant within them. And yet, Pynchon does not think sexual revolution is naive or hopeless. Rather, he does believe that there is “something to hold onto” in radical liberation; the Zone lays the stage for radical democracy, which can only emerge through the difficult work of creating a world together, not through the total affirmation of pleasure.

**Part 1: The Irreducible Strangeness of Sex**

For the counter-culture, sexual pleasure’s elusive nature, its ability to resist complete rationalization by The System, makes it fruitful ground for an oppositional politics. Counter-cultural and New Left theories of radical revolution often rely on two assertions. First, they argue that society is a singular entity comprised of a totalizing and integrated System. This concept, expressed in terms such as “One-Dimensional Society” (Marcuse), “technocracy” (Theodore Roszak), the “Military-Industrial Complex” (Students for Democratic Society), or simply “The System” or “The Man,” is parodied by Pynchon in his sixties novels as “They” or “Them.” For Marcuse, one-dimensional society’s manipulation of life is complete and total; it “extends to all spheres of private and public existence, integrates all authentic opposition, absorbs all alternatives” (18). Secondly, following from this assumption, the totalitarian character of this System means that any political opposition must come from outside it. Since the System is the product of a specific type of technologic rationality that has turned Enlightenment ideals of discovery into a tool of domination and control, this “outside” cannot come from the rational means of the System. It must come from that which the System has either excluded or has not recognized, namely the irrational. As Marcuse writes: “The advancing one-dimensional society alters the relationship between the rational and the
irrational, the realm of the irrational becomes the home of the really rational—of the ideas which may ‘promote the art of life’” (247). If one-dimensional society creates the division between what is rational/irrational and values only the former, then what it creates as its “other” holds the key to new forms of ethics. With its long association in the West with unreason, pleasure in the counterculture becomes a privileged realm of experimentation, difference, and power that speaks to an authentic freedom. Pleasure comes to embody the challenge to a singular force of rationalized control which can never fully absorb it.

Yet Pynchon, in his two sixties novels, *The Crying of Lot 49* and *Gravity’s Rainbow* challenges these two canonical sixties assertions. First Pynchon suggests that to imagine a singular totalizing system is to subscribe to a type of paranoia that desperately sweeps disparate forces under a singular entity which coordinates experience. *Gravity’s Rainbow* demonstrates that there are often multiple and competing systems of rationality which seek to control; because these systems are often in competition and unequal in power, no one of them has complete domination. Secondly, if all of these systems are incomplete, or fail in their totalizing missions, then there are experiences of bodies and relations outside of their knowledge and control. There is always an excess or

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65 In *Eros and Civilization* Marcuse argues that Eros became irrational in its subordination to Logos in Greek philosophy. Others, like Foucault see the division between reason and unreason as an Enlightenment project (Huffer 50). These historical arguments stand opposed to the ontological division in Freud and Brown’s theories. For them, this division is a universal and fundamental human condition.

66 He also challenges dominant conservative ideas of sexuality, but I am more concerned with his critique of countercultural theories of radical sexual liberation. There is substantial critical treatment of Pynchon’s critique of dominant ideas on sexuality. See for example Hite, Wolfley, David Cowart, and Sean McCann and Michael Szalay. These writers all see Pynchon as endorsing counter-cultural ideas, whereas I see him as providing a more critical stance.

67 In this respect, as I argue in more detail below, Pynchon’s model of power follows along the lines described by Foucault’s work rather than that described by the New Left and the Frankfurt School which stresses the totalitarian nature of power which “integrates” and thus neutralizes all opposition.
remainder, a realm of undecidability, or as Tyrone Slothrop, the protagonist of *Gravity’s Rainbow*, experiences it, “an irreducible strangeness,” that will always elude the grasp of rational control (243).

**Formless Magic**

In *The Crying of Lot 49*, Oedipa Maas has just started connecting the dots of the conspiracy plot that will soon obsess her when she notices a curious muted postal-horn symbol on a bar’s restroom wall:

...among lipsticked obscenities, she noticed the following message, neatly indited in engineering lettering:

“Interested in sophisticated fun? You, hubby, girl friends. The more the merrier. Get in touch with Kirby, through WASTE only, Box 7391, L.A.” (38)

The ad itself brings together the superfluity of meanings Oedipa places on the nebulous underground WASTE postal system and its likely symbol, the muted postal-horn. The ad, among other “lipsticked obscenities,” is rendered in neat engineered letters, indicating a planned effort and care rather than a spontaneous scrawling. The ad promises a swinging or orgy opportunity, yet it describes this as “sophisticated” fun. Oedipa copies the image and the address into her memo book considering that it is “hieroglyphics,” a text that requires more than just a passive surface reading. She contemplates “It might be something sexual, but she somehow doubted it” (28). The manifest content of the text on the wall does state its sexual nature, yet Oedipa refuses to isolate its meaning as exclusively sexual.

As Oedipa’s plot progresses, the WASTE postal system and its associated image become central to a web of symbols, events, and persons whose meanings are
overdetermined, obscure, and elusive. Yet, the sexual content of the ad is more than just another red herring. Oedipa encounters in her fruitless and frustrating odyssey to uncover the conspiracy she has found herself caught within (or maybe, she considers, she has projected the conspiracy herself). Seduction structures Oedipa’s very interest in understanding and eluding this conspiracy. Many of Oedipa’s initial interest points into the conspiracy come by way of sexual seduction or initiation. Her entrance into the diegetic plot of the novel corresponds with her discovery that she is the executor of the will of a former lover, Pierce Inverarity. This leads her to discover (or infer) “an elaborate plot,” as Oedipa terms it, of Inverarity’s own making. And yet, it is Oedipa who must figure out the amorphous and hidden plot: “Having no apparatus except gut fear and female cunning to examine this formless magic, to understand how it works, how to measure its field strength, count its lines of force, she may fall back on superstition, take up a useful hobby like embroidery, or go mad, or marry a disk jockey” (12). The magic, like pleasure itself, is paradoxically elusive and pervasive. Oedipa wants to give this magic a shape and determine its origin; yet throughout her narrative, the more she finds out about it, the more formless it becomes, continually eluding her plotting and understanding. She can barely name it, let alone determine its lines of force.

And yet Oedipa needs to understand this formless magic, so she must construct a plot (she has already tried marrying a disk jockey, with few positive results). When she meets Metzger, the co-executor of Inverarity’s estate, in a motel room, Metzger tries to seduce the married Oedipa by plying her with wine. Coincidentally, a film in which Metzger starred as a young boy is playing on the motel room’s TV: “Either he made up the whole thing, Oedipa thought suddenly, or he bribed the engineer over at the local
station to run this, it’s all part of a plot, an elaborate, seduction, plot” (20). Metzger becomes a virtual stand-in for Inverarity at times in the novel, prompting the question whether we can disentangle Inverarity’s intricate, long-term plot from Metzger’s elaborate seduction plot. That is, if there is a plot other than the one Oedipa projects. For Oedipa, figuring out the conspiracy plot (she does not entertain that there may be multiple) is a type of seduction, a desire for a unitary systematic explanation for events which seem to elude understanding. This desire becomes the promise of something more significant than her sixties middle-class clichés of Tupperware parties, kitchen herb gardens and psychoanalyst sessions; these offer poor explanations for this formless magic and little comfort from its effects.

While seduction is aligned with the conspiracy plot of the novel, sexual pleasure also opposes and threatens Oedipa’s mapping of the plot by inserting into it indeterminacy and ambiguity. In disrupting the cause and effect on which of the plot relies and opening up contingency, sex in the novel is closer in kind to what Oedipa calls the “formless magic,” a discernible force that is unable to be pinned down or controlled. In her motel room, Metzger and Oedipa bet about the ending of the film—whether Metzger’s character, the character’s father and a dog will sink to their deaths in a submarine. After a commercial break the film comes back on and the trio are nowhere to be found in the film. Metzger explains that the reels must have gotten screwed up at the station. Oedipa, confused and drunk, loses track of the cause and effect of the plot, unclear if the scene is before or after what they have been previously watching. Escalating the game Metzger challenges her to a game of “Strip Botticelli.” In preparation, Oedipa excuses herself to put on all of the clothes she has brought with her.
However, upon seeing herself in the mirror, she laughs so violently that she falls over and knocks a can of hairspray which careens around the room:

The can knew where it was going, she sensed, or something fast enough, God or a digital machine, might have computed in advance the complex web of its travel; but she wasn’t fast enough, and knew only that it might hit them at any moment, at whatever clip it was doing, a hundred miles an hour. (25)

Like the tower, the hairspray can seems to obey a logic akin to what Pynchon calls in *Gravity’s Rainbow*, “the order of the other side.” It either requires some supernatural explanation (God) or a super-human intelligence (digital machine); it cannot be deduced or understood by human intellect. Oedipa refuses to dismiss the can’s motion as randomness. Rather she believes that the can itself is guided by some plan, whether it be an intention of the can itself, or an extra-human force; the can has a motive, a plot, an order. Yet this plot is always elusive and undecipherable, a type of excessive alternate logic external to rational human understanding and Oedipa’s reading practices. The question for Oedipa, and for the novel itself, is whether this other realm of sex and irrationality can be in fact be plotted, or if it speaks to a perhaps more terrifying option: that there are limits to human intellect and we are only given crude signs and symbols of this “formless magic” to manufacture meanings that never quite give the magic form.

Superstition for Oedipa seems a better choice than madness, but both pale in comparison to the rational understanding she craves.

This is what attracts Oedipa to the plot in the first place: its very elusiveness, its refusal to be rationalized at the same time it holds out the promise of a higher, super-human form of rationality, or even an entirely different realm of reality. Sexuality

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68 Slothrop explains further: “no serial time over there: events are all there in the same eternal moment and so certain messages don’t always ‘make sense’ back here: they lack historical structure, they sound fanciful, or insane” (637).
provides what the novel calls “the promise of hierophany,” a higher meaning pointing toward an extra-rational realm which does not obey any recognizable logic. The formless magic to which Oedipa is so attracted to is a greater understanding of the forces that structure her world, and yet the frustrating paradox is that the more Oedipa understands these forces the more elusive they become, seducing her back into the plot. She is left aimlessly tracking the formless magic of pleasure, something only graced by her rational intellect, holding the promise of transcendence which can only to be felt and intuited, never fully known.

While critics have held “They” to be real, in Pynchon’s work, we never actually see these systems in their totality and they are never wholly effective in their aims to rationalize the world. If we take Slothrop and Oedipa as the characters in their own tales who are the most qualified to speak about “Them,” spending their lives unraveling the mysteries of their place within this administered society, we see that they both fail to come to any type of satisfying conclusion about who “They” really are and what they really want. Slothrop and Oedipa are not even sure that there really is a They, and as readers we are not in any privileged epistemological vantage point. Thus, their only recourse is to lapse into paranoia: “If there is something comforting—religious, if you want, about paranoia, there is still also anti-paranoia, where nothing is connected to anything, a condition not many of us can bear for long” (441). There is a powerful drive within them to map over the territory even as they recognize the territory might not be able to be mapped. Or as Slothrop puts it, “Either They have put him here for a reason, of

69 See Levine, Poirier, Wolff, Hite, Edward Mendleson, Tom LeClair and Kathryn Hume. Postmodern approaches like Bersani’s and McClure’s see “They” as a paranoiac construction, but nevertheless see They as rational sources of control. My approach is more akin to Luc Herman’s and Petrus van Ewijk’s approach which sees systems in Gravity’s Rainbow as providing only an illusion of totality.
he’s just here. He isn’t sure that he wouldn’t, actually, rather have that reason” (441). In his inability to understand and map out the totality of the System that affects him, Slothrop calls into question the very System itself, and considers that he may be the one creating the system in his head. Like Oedipa who finds that interpreting hidden meanings is seductive, seduction propels Slothrop’s paranoid (or not) plotting.

Oedipa and Slothrop find an incredible erotic investment in attaching a name and following the threads of this formless magic. Oedipa and Slothrop are rarely considered counter-cultural stereotypes, but there is nonetheless an element of their project of unmasking that seeks to cement their authenticity and innocence within an opposition to the System. As the second “Proverb for Paranoids” states: “The innocence of the creature is in inverse proportion to the immorality of the Master” (244). To be subject to the system and to know this, or at least think they know it, is to be distinct from it. As Slothrop reasons, “Their neglect is your freedom” (708). In short, there are powerful drives to ignore the complex interplays of multiple systems of power and control, all of them only partial, and instead to connect the dots into one overarching, totalizing conspiracy. The mistake Oedipa and Slothrop make is that they assume that there is conceivably a way to map a unitary, integrated system of control in an objective sense. But they not only make a philosophical mistake in ascribing all that they touch to a singular coordinated system; their philosophical mistake results from their erotic investment in their narratives of freedom and innocence. In this sense, the totems of their conspiracy, the WASTE muted postal horn and the Rocket, are similar. Pynchon locates a power and seduction in the symbolic identity of messy assemblages: “Crosses, swastikas,

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70 See Bersani, “Pynchon, Paranoia, and Literature” and McClure, “Forget Conspiracy.” Both Bersani and McClure point to the inadequacies of paranoia as a foundation for or method of resistance, but nevertheless, both maintain that there is an entity to be paranoid about.
Zone-mandalas, how can the ynot speak to Slothrop?” (638). They are all totems that give a shape to formless magic that escapes language; they connects the dots into a stable, unitary image. With them, all the loose ends can be swept under the rug and meaning can be both somewhat fixed while open for interpretation at the same time. In this sense, they are not much different than “They” which expresses a paranoid and mistaken investment in a coordinated system of control.

Oedipa and Slothrop are not alone in their inability to systematize and achieve total comprehension of the world around them; in fact, in Pynchon’s sixties novels all systems of rational thought fail to predict and control the world. This does not mean that they are completely ineffectual and do not cause real harm to those whom they attempt to control; rather it means that they never achieve the total integration and administration they seek. Take for example, Roger Mexico’s early discussion of the War as a system, which though it appears to be multiple and dispersed, seeks a totalization:

The War, the empire, will expedite such barriers between our lives. The War needs to divide this way, and to subdivide, though its propaganda will stress unity, alliance, pulling together. The War does not appear to want a folk-consciousness, not even of the sort the Germans have engineered, *ein Volk ein Führer*—it wants a machine of many separate parts, not a oneness, but a complexity....Yet who can presume to say what the War wants, so vast and aloof is it...so absentee. Perhaps the War isn’t even an awareness—not a life at all, really. There may only be some cruel, accidental resemblance to life. (133)

Mexico gives the War a subject position, describing what the War *wants*, which gives it a self awareness, a “life,” that Mexico admits it may not possess. The War becomes an overdetermined symbol naming an assemblage of “separate parts” into a oneness. For Mexico, the War is a scheme of rationalization, for others the War is a “celebration of markets,” or it emerges from the demands of technology (107). In short, the system of the
war is overdetermined and varied and yet the War is easily reified into a singular self-aware entity.

Placing a name on an amorphous and changing assemblage is one way that characters in the novels deal with contingency. Consider the second section of *Gravity’s Rainbow* which is set at a Monte Carlo casino. Pynchon treats the roulette wheel as an extended metaphor not only for the frustrating role of chance, but also as a symbol of the limits of rationality to completely predict and administer experience. As Slothrop plays roulette with Katje: “The ball drops in a compartment whose number they never see. Seeing the number is supposed to be the point. But in the game behind the game, it is not the point” (210-11). The “game behind the game” has at least two resonances in the scene: (1) the game of chance, (2) the erotic game he is playing with Katje. Each seems to be ruled by the “game behind the game,” which may be in fact all under the control of “They” which gives it a third resonance: “When They chose numbers, red, black, odd, even what did They mean by it? What Wheel did They set in motion?” (211). Slothrop, confronted with the limits of knowledge, develops an explanation that the conspiracy against him is not only rigged, but obeys a logic, what he calls “orders beyond the visible,” that he cannot reach or understand.

At this point in the novel, Slothrop, only recently beginning to suspect a conspiracy, believes that the conspiracy against him extends up to the Forbidden Wing. He likens the group to a “terrible croupier”: “all in his life of what has looked free or random, is discovered to’ve been under some Control, all the time, the same as a fixed roulette wheel...and where the House always does, of course, keep turning a profit...” (212). Slothrop thinks he is part of a game and that like a casino, chance and freedom
have only been an illusion; the game has been rigged against him since the beginning.

And yet, at the same moment, Katje is spinning the roulette wheel and speaks to Slothrop about their curious connection:

Between you and me is not only a rocket trajectory, but also a life. You will come to understand that between the two points, in the five minutes, it lives an entire life. You haven’t even learned the data on our side of the flight profile, the visible or the trackable. Beyond them there’s so much more, so much none of us know...

Katje, having a more comprehensive view of “They” than Slothrop, insists on a limit to the knowledge of the Rocket, which has data points that have yet to be discovered, just like the relationship in which the two are now engaged. That is, there are data points, but it is such a flimsy data set that they cannot make accurate predictions.

Katje, who knows “They” is much larger than Slothrop believes, references the limit to her own and Slothrop’s rational knowledge, but Katje still maintains that it is all fundamentally knowable. “So much none of us know,” is nevertheless something that is known by someone, and she holds out hope that it will be known by her someday.

Toward the end of the novel, Katje, who wants to save Slothrop, tells Enzian: “Don’t I have to know why he’s out here, what I did to him, for Them? How can They be stopped? How long can I get away with the easy, cheap exits? Shouldn’t I be going all the way in?”

This passage references the limits of both Katje’s and our knowledge in a way strikingly similar to Slothrop’s. Both imagine themselves at a great distance from the truth; yet from our vantage point, Katje has much more knowledge than other characters. If we as readers are given as much as an objective portrait of the world and its characters, being able to move among several hundred minds and situations from different vantage points, then Katje is the one in the novel, who has touched the main nodes of the possible
conspiracy: Hitler, Blicero, The White Visitation, Slothrop and now Enzian. She should have the best grasp within the novel, the most complete map. And yet, even her map reveals little about “Them” other than her own comfort in constructing “Them” out of the data points she has.

**Noise in the System**

If there is so much more neither Slothrop or Katje (or any of us) can know, what is preventing them from getting this information? The parabola, gravity’s rainbow itself, often taken by critics to be a symbol of rationality’s repression of the irrational, shows up in this scene as a limit to rational knowledge and understanding. After Katje speaks the line “so much more none of us know” the narrative switches to the narrator’s voice: “But it is a curve each of them feels, unmistakably. It is the parabola” (212). Notice that each of them “feels” this as a truth, but it cannot be deduced or intuited; it can only be *felt*. The parabola in geometrical terms, approaches zero, but cannot become or transcend it. For the aeronautical engineer Roland Feldspath, the “long-co-opted expert on control systems,” the parabola represents a limit to rational knowledge, a boundary between “this side” of human rational intellect and “the other side” (240). The Rocket with its testing of the parabola, seeks to transcend and escape it.

Feldspath, like the other rocket engineers who “struggle against weights and probes of cranial pain that could not be born waking,” is “tense with all the frustration of trying to reach across” (241). The height of scientific rationality, the smartest guys in the room, coordinated by the most powerful entities of the world cannot surpass the limit. If

71 See, for example Hite and Wolfley. For Hite, the rainbow is a symbol of Marcusean rational-repression, whereas Wolfley envisions it in the terms of Norman O. Brown as the limitation to the free movement of Eros and Thanatos.
in scientific rationality “a limit was always always there to be brought to,” trying to surpass this limit is an unsatisfying task. The best Feldspath can hope for is merely “glimpses into another order of being” (242). For Feldspath: “Edges were hardly ever glimpsed, much less flirted at or with. Destruction, oh, and demons—yes, including Maxwell’s—were there, deep in the woods, with other beasts vaulting among the earthworks of your safety” (242). The engineers want to understand a totality, to rationally explain the beasts and the demons, but are unable to do more than brush against this realm with their inadequate tools. But the A4 rocket engineers are not the only ones who fail in their efforts to systemize and control for “total administration.”

In The Crying of Lot 49, we don’t have to look much further than Oedipa Maas’s name to see how these demons lurk around even the most well constructed plots. Critics have read Oedipa’s name as signifying many different things, from Oedipa “Mass” focusing on mass communication to a rewriting of the Oedipal detective story. One other way, considering her husband’s name, Wendell “Mucho” Maas (literally “much more”), is to think of Oedipa’s name as drawing our attention to the excess of Oedipal narratives. If Sophocles’ Oedipus is about the gradual revelation of a hidden plot and the Freudian Oedipal narrative is a plot of normal sexual development, Oedipa Maas’ narrative exceeds both of these plots. The particularity and messiness of Oedipa’s experience refuses to be subordinated and explained by these plots. The nature of the plot in the

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72 Maxwell’s Demon also plays a prominent role in The Crying of Lot 49. Maxwell’s Demon is a thought experiment challenging the notion of entropy.
73 In Gravity’s Rainbow this is called “the sinister cartography of naming” (327) in which names themselves don’t have any meaning, but the act of naming gives meaning. We could apply this not only to Pynchon’s naming of Oedipa, but also to the naming of the “System” in which the act of naming gives us the meaning of the entity.
74 Mendleson argues the resonance of Sophocles to Oedipa’s narrative. However, I depart from Mendleson’s reading in that the two do not correspond so easily.
novel is never discovered; indeed for Oedipa, we encounter many loose threads, misdirections, and doubt before we are ripped away from a possible (although not entirely likely) “big reveal” at the auction house at the end of the novel. Sophocles is no guide here.\textsuperscript{75} And neither, does it appear, is Freud. Indeed throughout the text, in the form of Dr. Hilarius, Oedipa’s shrink who tries to “submit” himself to the Freudian system of thought, “ Tried to cultivate a faith in the literal truth of everything he wrote, even the idiocies and contradictions” (109):

And part of me must have really wanted to believe–like a child hearing, in perfect safety, a tale of horror–that the unconscious would be like any other room, once the light was let in...that therapy could tame it all, bring it into society with no fear of its someday reverting. (110)

And yet, the unconscious is continually elusive; the Oedipal narrative cannot fully explain human behavior by shedding light on it, and it cannot fully make experience understandable. As Hilarius notes, Freud’s vision of the world had no Buchenwalds in it:

“Buchenwald, according to Freud, once the light was let in, would become a soccer field, fat children would learn flower-arranging and solfeggio in the strangling rooms. At Auschwitz the ovens would be converted over to petit fours and wedding cakes, and the V-2 missiles to public housing for the elves. I tried to believe it all” (112). Hilarius loses faith not just in Freud’s theories, but in any systematized notion of the world. He turns his back on psychoanalysis’s ability to penetrate nuance and complexity to rationally order them.

But with his faith in a system shattered, Hilarius tells Oedipa to hold onto that part of herself that refuses to fit within her middle-class existence in Kinneret:

\textsuperscript{75} We find a similar problem of interpretation in the inability to track down the origins and meaning of the “Trystero” line in \textit{The Courier’s Tragedy}. The play itself takes on a series of contemporary interpretations that overburden its plot with meaning.
“I came,” she said, “hoping you could talk me out of a fantasy.”
“Cherish it!” cried Hilarius, fiercely. “What else do you have? Hold it tightly by its little tentacle, don’t let the Freudians coax it away or the pharmacists poison it out of you. Whatever it is, hold it dear, for when you lose it you go over by that much to the others. You begin to cease” (113)

Hilarius is a classic counter-cultural theorist. The only way for her to have individuality, the only way to reclaim a modicum of freedom, is for Oedipa to embrace the excess of her fantasy and exploit its unwillingness to be subsumed into systematic and controlling modes of thought.

Hilarius points not only to the inability of rational systems to control but also to the dangerous illusion of control: “You begin to cease” (113). Entropy, the movement toward stasis, is one of Pynchon’s favored themes. As described at the end of his short story of the same name, one definition of entropy is when an equilibrium of temperature “should prevail both outside and inside, and forever, and the hovering, curious dominant of their separate lives should resolve into a tonic of darkness and the final absence of all motion” (Slow Learner 98). In this sense, entropy is to be feared, an ominous development that leads to stasis and death. In Freudian terms, it is death drive’s (Thanatos’s) movement of disintegration toward stasis; it is an opposite force from Eros’ creation of greater unities. Entropy means an end to change, as foreshadowed by the story’s epigraph from Miller’s Tropic of Cancer: “...There will be more calamities, more death, more despair. Not the slightest indication of a change anywhere. We must get into step, a lockstep toward the prison of death. There is no space. The weather will not change” (qtd. in Pynchon Slow 81). As in the Freudian model, while change is associated with life, death is associated with stasis. But as “Entropy” points out, systems like

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76 As David Seed argues in his comprehensive reading of the theme of “entropy” in the story, there are in fact multiple definitions and valences of “entropy” in Pynchon’s work.
psychoanalysis are a type of stasis, a type of death. They are ways to freeze a process of complexity and contingency into a static, readable form. Change and freedom are only preserved by holding onto the tentacle of fantasy.

Taking place in adjacent apartments in Washington, DC, the story explores two meanings of entropy. One, associated with the character of Callisto is similar to the one described above. For Callisto whose conception is based on an energy systems model, entropy is “heat-death” the movement toward temperature equilibrium. This is recapitulated in social terms: “[He] envisioned a heat-death for his culture in which ideas, like heat-energy, would no longer be transferred, since each point in it would ultimately have the same quantity of energy; and intellectual motion would, accordingly cease” (88-89). In the model, reaching temperature equilibrium, movement ceases (because movement only happens through temperature differentials). Callisto’s rather simplistic and dualist model of entropy is associated with a theoretical model of certainty which leads him down to an “enervated fatalism,” the type Hilarius warns Oedipa about. In this sense, Callisto is paranoid in the terms of Gravity’s Rainbow: “Paranoids want to perfect moments of immobility” (582).

Yet in the other apartment where a chaotic party is taking place, we get a different conception of entropy through information systems. Characters Meatball and Saul discuss the ways in which entropy wreaks havoc on rational systems of thought.

Applying information and communication theory to their love lives, Saul argues:

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77 The Zone is likened to an information system. In the Zone, information is the “real medium of exchange” (261).
78 The model that Saul discusses here is a cybernetic systems model. The crucial difference is that in a cybernetic model, the system is composed of information (not energy) exchanges. This leads to vastly more complex systems. Seed notes Pynchon’s engagement with cybernetics, particularly cyberneticist guru Norbert Wiener’s The Human Use of Human Beings (1950). Wiener
Tell a girl: ‘I love you.’ No trouble with two-thirds of that, it’s a closed circuit. Just you and she. But that nasty four-letter world in the middle, that’s the one you have to look out for. Ambiguity. Redundance. Irrelevance, even. Leakage. All this is noise. Noise screws up your signal, makes for disorganization in the circuit. (90-91)

If Callisto’s perspective represents a view of rational systems as a fatalistic theoretical model leading toward absolute stasis and control, Saul’s perspective represents the impossibility of a fatalistic, deterministic model to create stasis and control. Callisto’s systems model presumes dualistic forces within a closed system. However in Saul’s model, a system based on multiple, indeterminate types of information inputs and relations between communicating entities, no equilibrium is possible. The main difference is that information systems require meaning and this meaning is never quite fixed. In his conception, there is “noise” and “leakage” which “screws” up the informing signal and disorganizes the determinism of the circuit. Characteristic of Pynchon’s sixties works, this “noise” is associated with intimacy. In Saul’s conception, between the lovers is a closed-circuit, a completely integrated, static system (“just you and she”), which runs smoothly. And yet, this system “leaks” when the meaning (“love”) is introduced and disorganizes the circuit. The very communication of “love” in this circuit breaks the closed circuit with its overdetermined meaning, introducing the element of noise and disorganization. In short, love is that which leaks from the closed system; love cannot be contained within the circuit.

In *Gravity’s Rainbow* pleasure also eludes the forces of rational control with its inability to be accurately quantified and predicted. Most notably, Slothrop is conditioned by Laszlo Jamf at an early age to receive an erection when in the presence of the **cautioned that cybernetic models of information systems do not necessarily correspond to the complexities of lived social experience.**
chemical aphrodisiac Imipolex G used on the V-1 rocket. Noticing the correlation between Slothrop’s sexual encounters and bombing locations, the researchers at “The White Visitation,” both Pointsman, the Pavlovian, and Roger Mexico, the statistician, attempt to define this link. However, they have a difficult time determining the lines of causation between the bombings and instances of Slothrop’s erection. Brigadier Pudding believes that there is something so cut and dried about sex that it can easily be integrated into statistical schemes:

> But a hardon, that’s either there, or isn’t. Binary, elegant. The job of observing it can even be done by a student.
> Unconditioned stimulus = stroking penis with antiseptic cotton swab.
> Unconditioned responses = hardon
> Conditioned response = hardon whenever $x$ is present, stroking no longer necessary, all you need is that $x$ (86)

And yet, the researchers are unsure of whether Slothrop is able to predict where a rocket will fall or whether he is causing the rocket to fall. It’s important to understand this for Pointsman: “When we find it, we’ll have shown again the stone determinacy of everything, of every soul. There will be precious little room for any hope at all. You can see how important a discovery like that would be” (88). For Pointsman understanding the causal mechanisms of sexuality are key to the master behaviorist goal of stone determinism; Pointsman hopes to eliminate contingency by uncovering its determinate order. The importance of this discovery is not lost on Pointsman: it points to the ability to control contingency.

And yet, Slothrop’s pleasure continually eludes them. In Pointsman’s eyes this means that the researchers have a poverty of data. Pointsman maintains that the stimulus must be the rocket, despite the fact that the response (hard-on) seems to happen *in reverse*. There is conceivably, *some* piece of data out there that shows the strict
determinism of the matter, perhaps “fluctuations in the sexual market, in pornography or prostitutes, perhaps tying into prices on the Stock Exchange itself, that we clean-living lot know nothing about?” (88). As the complexities and contingencies multiply for Pointsman, he becomes more ardent in his determination that there is a “cue, right in front of our eyes, that we haven’t the subtlety of heart to see” (88). Rather than changing his theory to suit the proliferation of possible causes, or even abandon the behaviorist structure of his argument, Pointsman believes that more research is necessary to find the singular cue. Pointsman is the chief example of the hubris of control, the belief that there is a “stone determinacy” to every event, every soul. And yet, Pointsman, like the others who believe in a stone determinacy are parodies, believing in their own theories to allow them to control. I do not mean to suggest that Pointsman, because he is a ridiculously tragic figure blinded by rational hubris, is harmless. Pointsman’s danger to Slothrop, Mexico and others does not arise from his ability to use determinism to predict and control, but rather the danger lies in his adherence to his own theory, which slips into fanatical absurdity. It is not the symmetry of stimulus/response itself that Pointsman is drawn to, but to the “seduction” of the symmetry as he puts it, which he desires but cannot grasp. Similar to the paranoid’s delusion that everything is connected and determined, Pointsman desires a closed, static rationalized system of explanation which eliminates the “noise” of pleasure.

Pointsman’s foil at The White Visitation, Roger Mexico, thinks he can come closer to understanding the truth of Slothrop’s erection. Mexico, the “anti-Pointsman,” challenges Pointsman on the mechanical explanations. While for Pointsman there is no effect without a clearly determined cause, Mexico believes that “The next great
breakthrough may come when we have the courage to junk cause-and-effect entirely, and strike off at some other angle” (91). In this respect, the differences between Pointsman and Mexico are similar to the differences between Callisto and Saul in “Entropy.” Pointsman and Callisto’s dualist model is inadequate to understand complexity. Pointsman, for his part, thinks Mexico’s rational probability is cheap nihilism, “the last refuse of the incorrigibly lazy” just some “yang-yin rubbish” lacking the scientific rigor of his own analysis (90). Mexico believes that statistical probability allows him to address the uncertainty presented by the occurrences of Slothrop’s erection and the bomb, its disruption of cause and effect. However, even Mexico comes up empty which causes a crisis of faith in statistical probability: “But he feels the foundation of that discipline trembling a bit now, deeper than oddity ought to drive. Odd, odd, odd–think of the word: such white finality in its closing clap of tongue. It implies moving past the tongue-stop–beyond the zero–and into the other realm” (87). That there exists “the other realm,” the place “beyond the zero” where rational explanation cannot and will not go, the realm of “randomness and fright” is the best Mexico can discover (57). The very insistence of Slothrop’s erection to obey the physical laws of another order signals to Mexico the inability to fully understand and achieve full control. For The White Visitation, sex becomes the embodiment of randomness, leakage and noise that frustrates any attempt to fully rationalize and control it.

We could also add other systems of control here that fail to explain the peculiarities of Slothrop’s sexual correlation with the rocket: Freudian psychoanalysis, cybernetics, economics. Total knowledge and control of Slothrop’s sex life (“the penis he thought was his own”) continually eludes those trying to understand it, just as Slothrop
himself physically eludes control. And yet this control is always partially there, or at least a specter of it is, even in the most private intimate moments. When The White Visitation sets up Slothrop to rescue Katje from Gregor the Octopus in Monte Carlo, Slothrop and Katje both have the knowledge that their love-making is organized as a part of control. And yet, while the two know they are inhabiting roles prescribed for them by others, they nevertheless experience a moment of unaccounted chance (the scene takes place in a casino). When they first make love, Slothrop questions his desire: “...is it for her? or wired into the Slothropian Run-together they briefed her on...” (199). Katje too, despite her mercenary use of her sexuality throughout the novel, demands a sexual pleasure all her own that is not prescribed by the systems of control she is subject to. With Slothrop, the “play” between systems of control and her own desires becomes a realm of relative autonomy:

And yet, the play between the dictated plot and her own pleasure continues: thinking she might be close to coming he reaches a hand into her hair, tries to still her head, needing to see her face: this is suddenly a struggle, vicious and real–she will not surrender her face–and out of nowhere she does begin to come, and so does Slothrop. (199)

There is a certain ambiguity to the “struggle” here; is it between Slothrop and Katje or internal to Katje? After all, expert spies both of them, they know that each other knows that the other has some ulterior motive. Or perhaps it is between Katje’s sense of allegiance to her duty as part of the plot against Slothrop which is threatened by her pleasure and ultimately, affection, for Slothrop? And yet, even within this structure, there is the implication that this encounter, at least in part, is dictated by the pleasures of contingency and chance, pleasure that is not planned in advanced, and thus uncontrollable: “For some reason now, she who never laughs has become the top surface
of a deep, rising balloon of laughter. Later as she’s about to go to sleep, she will also whisper, ‘Laughing,’ laughing again” (199). However this acknowledgement of an *ex nihilo* feeling of pleasure taking over Katje may also be part of the act. Slothrop thinks “Oh, They let you” but then reconsiders, “then again maybe They don’t” (199). It is in the very undecidability that intimacy and ecstatic pleasure exist. In Katje’s discussion toward the end of the novel with Enzian, perhaps the most honest conversation in the novel, she seems to deeply care for Slothrop. And yet is desire can never be fully distinguished from forces of control. Between Katje and Slothrop, there is no space of “pure” pleasure. Rather desire only emerges from the unaccounted for contingencies of their plots. The novel is not completely cynical on the nature of this pleasure. Even within these controlled contexts, pleasure’s failure to maintain its consistency, to slip into unexpected and unplanned pleasure, threatens the forces of control, threatens to undo the best laid plans and plots. While elements of control can never be distinguished, there is always an element of pleasure that even the most sophisticated systems cannot control.

**Approaching Zero**

However for Pynchon, because realms like sexuality and death elude the full grasp of rationality, it does not follow that these are necessarily paths to liberation.\(^79\) In fact, Pynchon entertains the notion that they may be downright terrifying and even more unfree than the System. Consider the Rocket itself, the main symbol of the collusion between pleasure and destruction in the novel. While it is a product of rationalized

\(^{79}\) Indeed this is McCann’s and Szalay’s criticism of post-60s criticism which puts too much of an emphasis on the mystical as opposed to a politics of the real world. However, I am more influenced here by Patrick McHugh’s argument that *Gravity’s Rainbow* is keenly interested in the limits to counter-cultural politics.
control, for most of the novel, it expresses a powerful erotic desire for an escape from rationality. The S-Gērat rocket’s transcendence moves toward sex and death as an escape from the confines of rationality. In its attempt to break “gravity’s rainbow,” the parabola of its flight path, the Rocket hopes to approach the “other side.” While the Rocket is a symbol of liberation, it is a type of liberation which turns its back on the here and now in name of transcendent pleasure. Given the that this pleasure is predicated on others’ destruction, the Rocket in the novel is more frightening and unpredictable than the rational forces of control. While the “noise” in the system can lead to new modes of thought and new bases for social thinking, when unleashed it can also lead to further exploitation and violence under the guise of liberation. Rather than being a wellspring of freedom and human potential, Pynchon’s novels propose that pleasure stems from the same “order of the other side” as does destruction and violence. Gravity’s Rainbow does not present a simple dichotomy of “make love, not war”; love and war can easily slip into each other when they embrace a radical politics of irrational pleasure.

Accordingly, Pynchon critiques the counter-cultural affirmation of irrational pleasure that was popularized by such Freudian Leftists as Norman O. Brown. As critics such as Morris Dickstein, Marianne DeKoven and John Carlevale have argued, Brown fits alongside other crucial counter-cultural theorists such as Paul Goodman, Wilhelm Reich, R.D. Laing and Marcuse in arguing for a radical political transformation that comprised psychic, spiritual and erotic experience. Carlevale argues that Brown was the most influential of this “Dionysian revival” of the sixties, for which Brown was praised.

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80 There are at three major types of rockets in the novel: the A4; the V-1; and the “the Rocket” with a capitalized R, the S-Gerät 11/0000 created under the direction of Weissman/Blicero. The S-Gerät, unlike the other two, is not a product of technical rationality, but a product of a mystical force, given to it by the substance Imipolex G.
by Susan Sontag as the first major attempt to “formulate an eschatology of immanence in the seventy years since Nietzsche” (262). Indeed, it is Brown’s Nietzschean reading of Freud that distinguishes his work from Marcuse. However, it is this emphasis on the Nietzschean Dionysian in the counter-culture that concerns Pynchon. As Carlevale argues, in sixties literature the Dionysian is double-edged. At one extreme, the Dionysian heralded an “apocalyptic deliverance from the dialectic of history” or at least a “welcome relief from the constraints of technocracy” (365). However, at the other extreme, the Dionysian stood for premonitions of immanent cultural disaster” (365). Such ecstatic Dionysian togetherness in this respect is critiqued in sixties literature because it is often indistinguishable from totalitarian conformity or in extreme cases, its quest for “primitive rituals of renewal might devolve into true blood rites that demand real victims” (365). Throughout Gravity’s Rainbow Pynchon is interested in articulating the distinction between these two extremes and worries about the inability of his characters to do so. By reading Eros in Gravity’s Rainbow through the lens of Brown, we can see how Pynchon argues against an affirmative embrace of unreason, of “the order of the other side” that Dionysian theorists like Brown propose.

Scholarly in his Life Against Death and poetically in Love’s Body (1966), Brown argues for a theory of radical liberation in which Eros’ forces of life and change overcome Thanatos’ drive for disintegration and stasis. Like Marcuse, Brown finds Western dualism to be a problem. As Brown sees it, the split between Dionysian/Erotic forces of greater unity and Apollonian/Thanatic forces aiming toward stasis (the Nirvana-

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81 Carlevale reads William Golding’s Lord of the Flies, Roderick Thorp’s Dionysus, Saul Bellows’ Herzog, and Gore Vidal’s Myra Breckinridge through this framework, but none of Pynchon’s novels.

82 For an introduction to Brown’s theories see David Greenham’s The Resurrection of the Body: The Work of Norman O. Brown.
principle) is a fundamental and universal human condition; they are not of a historical
nature, as Marcuse claims. In his equation of Nietzschean and Freudian concepts, Brown
argues that Apollo represents rationality, sublimation, and most crucially, the “negation
of instinct,” in favor of the reality principle (*Life* 174). Brown absolves this contradiction
by releasing Eros from negation so that it can consume the contradiction itself. The
dialectic of the rational and the irrational, Eros and Thanatos, cannot be overcome
through the Eros’s negation of Death, but it can in the Nietzschean idea of the affirming
“the dialectical unity of the great instinctual opposites” (*Life* 175). If we have been
accustomed to thinking of life as existing *against* death, then we must follow Eros in its
drive for greater and greater unities by accepting death as *part of* life. In order to do this,
we must construct the ego along different lines, a paradoxical “Dionysian Ego” through
the “resurrection” of the erotic pleasures of the body.

What would this look like? In Brown’s model this “resurrected body” would
follow the “life instinct” (or “sexual instinct”) and demand both a “play” and a union
with others based on narcissism and “erotic exuberance” over anxiety and aggression.
This newly polymorphously perverse human body would delight in the life “of all the
body which it now fears” *including death* (*Life* 308). Brown sharply distinguishes the
erotic overtaking or overcoming of death from negation because negation negates death
above all: “The consciousness strong enough to endure full life would be no longer
Apollonian but Dionysian–consciousness which does not observe the limit, but
overflows; consciousness which does not negate any more” (*Life* 308). This
consciousness is the full flowering of Eros, its unqualified affirmation, the connection to
everything, including death. As he puts it in Love’s Body, the task is “to make in ourselves a new consciousness, an erotic sense of reality” (81).  

In abandoning negation in favor of unrestrained affirmation, Brown questions dialectical thought’s refusal to embrace complete liberation. Brown follows Nietzsche more closely than Marcuse and sees negation as a fatally flawed aspect of humanity (rather than of Western thought) that must be overcome by unifying life and death. Negation reinforces division and so must be abandoned if we ever have any chance of being fully human: “Is there a way out; an end to analysis; a cure, is there such a thing as health? To heal is to make whole, as in wholesome; to make one again; to unify or reunify: this is Eros in action” (Love 80). Brown makes a case for abandoning Reason, which serves the power of Death and prevents the completion of Eros’ work: “Reason is power; powerful arguments; power-politics; Realpolitik; reality-principle” (“A Reply” 84). Uncovering a tradition from the Titans through Christ, Buddhism, Nietzsche, Freud, Mallarme to Roheim, Brown’s Love’s Body, not quite an anthology, an essay, or a poem, gives the sense that all genres, thoughts, all spiritual traditions from religion to animism are in the process of achieving greater and greater unities. Right now we are on the cusp of the final unity in which “one is united with the all, in an all consuming fire” (177). In

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83 The epigram for this section of the book “The Way Out,” is from Henry Miller’s Sunday After the War. In the passage Miller’s narrator explains that our era is on the verge of a new one in which the literal and figurative machines of domination will give way to a “lure that is truly occult” and man will “be forced to realize that power must be kept open, fluid and free. His aim will be not to possess power but to radiate it” (qtd. in Brown Life 305). Brown’s note explains that such utopian speculations are necessary given that fact that “today even the survival of humanity is a utopian hope” (305).

84 The precedent for Love’s Body is Huxley’s Perennial Philosophy (1945). Both of the texts are not only similarly structured, but contain many of the same passages. E.F. Dyck argues that the text’s form is a “Dionysiac body,” “the body broken and broken free of the chains that bound it; it is also the body symbolic and erotic” (35). As Dickstein and Greenham argue, Love’s Body is a poetic and religious work rather than theoretical. However, I would push back on this assertion
a passage that brings together William Blake, American Zen poet-artist Paul Reps, Rilke and Dante, Brown doesn’t so much as give us instantiations of a similar prophecy as Huxley’s *Perennial Philosophy* does, but he presents us with a timeless gathering together of all the instances of visionary thought that touches the expanding and unifying force of Eros. The way the text gathers together disparate fragments of mystical thought gives us the sense that these ideas are waiting for their final articulation to reach fruition:

> Learn to love the fire. The alchemical fire of transmutation: *Wolle die Wandlung. O sei für die Flammebegeistert.* To be content in the purgatorial fire. The fires of hell: “Walking among the fires of hell, delighting in the enjoyment of Genius, which to Angels look like torment and insanity.” The apocalyptic fire: “Meditate on the make-believe world as burning to ashes, and become *being above human.*” (178-179)

Brown’s apocalyptic vision provides a model of transcendence in which we reach the state, not of stasis of the Thanatos, but the freedom of fire created by Eros, “overcoming this world by reducing it to a fluctuating chaos, as in schizophrenia; the chaos which is the eternal ground of creation” (248). And this “fulfillment,” as Brown calls it, will come at a moment like a seal being broke open, “the seal which Freud called repression” or like daybreak, “we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in an instant, in the twinkling of an eye” (217). Though he never quite explains why this must come about at once, Brown justifies it by pointing to several apocalyptic visions. In Brown’s ontology, the unification of everything is Nothing (the last section of the book is “Nothing,” the first “Liberty”). And yet “Nothingness,” like the “order of the other side”

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*Given that almost all of the poetic arguments in *Love’s Body* are expressed in the more theoretical *Life Against Death.*


isn’t empty. It is merely unknowable; it is “Nothing” because that’s the only name we have for it. We will find liberty when Eros absorbs its last unity and finally and suddenly, everything has transcended into the new consciousness of Nothingness, an order of the other side.

Nothingness is a pervasive erotic concept in Gravity’s Rainbow. The rocket which Slothrop is drawn to, the special V-2 rocket created by the team lead by the madman Blicero “White Death,” is numbered “S-Gerät, 11/00000.” (Slothrop assumes that this must be a special model given that he’s never seen a rocket with four zeros, let alone five.) Zero is not the border between positive and negative realms. The order of the other side is not a negative realm which mirrors the positive. It is of a different order entirely that is named by Zero. Those Slothrop meets on his journey include people like Nora-Dodson Truck, the “erotic nihilist” who “carries on” about something she calls her ‘Ideology of the Zero’” (221). Dodson-Truck’s theory is never fully explained, but we can suspect it shares some aspect with the veneration of zero from Joseph Ombindi and his followers among the Hereros, “The Empty Ones.” They worship the S-Gerät because they think it may bring about what they call “Final Zero” or “The Eternal Center,” the “Center without time, the journey without hysteresis, where every departure is a return to the same place, only place....” (323). For the “Revolutionaries of the Zero,” Final Zero, delivered by the rocket, is a “movement toward stillness,” a tribal suicide to “finish the extermination the Germans began in 1904” (321). In addition to the trying to find the S-Gerät, they also practice sex in a way to ensure a negative birth-rate. But Final Zero also offers the promise of an explosion of pleasure. As Ombindi tells Enzian, the leader of the

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87 In this sense it is another example of the totems (Rocket, WASTE, swastika) that I am tracking in this chapter. It gives a name to something which otherwise remains undefined.
Schwarzkommando, the rocket firing in its singularity “embraces all the Deviations in one single act,” by which he means all sexual deviations, gathering everything from homosexuality to necrophilia into an all-inclusive polymorphous perversity (324). In this sense, Zero is not empty; emptiness is only a name given to a proliferation of indeterminate deviations.

The sexual valences of the Rocket are both glaringly obvious (its phallic shape) and necessarily ambiguous and indeterminate in the text (the Rocket means many different things to many undetermined people). I want to focus on one scene in particular, the sexual encounter between Slothrop and Katje, which contains many references to the Rocket. As they make love, the two discuss and contemplate the Rocket. Katje imagines it:

ascending, programmed in a ritual of love...at Brennschluss\textsuperscript{88} it is done—the Rocket’s purely feminine counterpart, the zero point a the center of its target, has submitted. All the rest will happen according to laws of ballistics. The Rocket is helpless in it. Something else has taken over. Something beyond what was designed in. (226)

This “something else,” this external element that is not a product of determinate design, an irrational excess, Katje understands as “a clear allusion to certain lusts that drive the planet and herself, and Those who use her—over its peak and down, plunging, burning, toward a terminal orgasm” (226). For Katje, death is not necessarily erotic; the Rocket doesn’t serve the forces of death (nor does it serve the force of life). Rather, as Blicero notes in his final words to Gottfried, it is a way “to leave this cycle of infection and

\textsuperscript{88} This is the moment when the rocket’s fuel is burned up and it turns from ascending to descending, creating the parabola, the gravity’s rainbow of its arc. It is often associated with orgasm in the novel.
death” (738). The Rocket represents an overcoming of the dualism of life and death, consuming both life and death as a terminal orgasm.

Interestingly enough, Brown uses gravity as a metaphor for limitation, much in the same as Pynchon. The “gravity of literalism” keeps our feet on the ground. He tells us “Feet off the ground. Freedom is instability; the destruction of attachments; the ropes, the fixtures, fixations, that tie us down” (260). Lawrence Wolfley, who explicitly examines the novel’s relationship to Brown’s ideas, sees the Rocket in the novel piercing through gravity’s repression a total apocalyptic revelation, akin to the atomic bomb. Critics have had a difficult time with the Rocket; it seems to confound consensus. It is both a product of technological rationality and a product of mad dreamers who wish to transcend rational understanding. It is a force of irrationality created through many rational means. The materially irrational element in the V-2, which makes it different from other rockets, is the substance “Imipolex G” created by Lazslo Jamf through an alchemist-mystical type of chemistry. The substance activates semen production (it is used on baby Tyrone Slothrop to condition his erection). When Katje is put in an exotic

89 Wolfley argues that Brown and Pynchon are in broad agreement over the repression of gravity. However, I am arguing here that Pynchon’s novel also provides a critique of Brown’s views of liberation.

90 Nadine Atwell argues that the Rocket’s meaning is subject to “endless equivocations” and deferrals in the text (46). Similarly Peter Cooper argues that it inspires “unbounded multiplicity” of interpretation both within and outside of the novel (186). Most critics have associated it with the terror of technological rationality. For example, for Hume, the rocket represents the “development of the symbiosis between humanity and its technological creations” (Mythography 107). Similarly, McClure has argued that Pynchon writes back against the “Weberian nightmare of global imperial rationalization” (Late Imperial 166). Hite has argued that the Rocket is “the twentieth century’s model of linearity” (Ideas 97). More recently, Hite has argued that the Rocket symbolizes how technological developments like the Rocket have their own “needs” and “wants” which are repressed; in this view the Rocket’s technology is read as an alternative type of redemption (685). While I am sympathetic to the arguments for the multiplicity of meanings for the Rocket, I am most interested in its association with irrational pleasure and death in the novel.

91 Several question whether Jamf is even “real.” The “world-renowned analyst” Mickey Wuxtry-Wuxtry argues that Jamf is only a fiction created by Slothrop “to help him deny what he could not possibly admit: that he might be in love, in sexual love, with his, and his race’s, death” (753).
costume made of the material, she recalls, “Nothing I ever wore, before or since, aroused me quite as much as Imipolex” (496). Yet there is something sinister to the material, it draws toward an abyss, a void, a submission that Katje will not embrace:

There was an abyss between my feet. Things, memories, no way to distinguish them any more, went tumbling downward through my head. A torrent. I was evacuating all these, out in some void...from my vertex, curling bright-colored hallucinations went streaming...baubles, amusing lines of dialogue, objets d’art...I was letting them all go. Holding none. Was this ‘submission,’ then–letting all these go? (496)

Once again pleasure is associated with a submission to Nothingness, a “letting go” of the things of this world, a holding of nothing. Submission here isn’t a death, so much as it is what Brown conceives of the final unity of the forces of life and death. Brown’s term for this is Nirvana, which he moves from Freud’s description of the Nirvana principle as “aiming at inactivity, rest, or sleep, the twin brother of death” to seeing Nirvana as a type of homeostasis, a way of getting rid of the tension between Life and Death (Life 87). In Brown’s reading of Freud, the Nirvana principle is also the pleasure principle; pleasure and death both stem from the primal Nirvana. In Love’s Body, Brown describes what will happen after the apocalyptic “fire”: “A void, an opening for us, to leave the place where we belong; a road, into the wilderness; for exodus, exile” (261). Yet, this void, this Nothing, is not merely the absence of everything. For Brown, like The Empty Ones, it is a point of creation: “Creation is out of nothing: the unreal awakens us out of the sleep of reality” (262). For Brown, all that is left is the pleasure of the aesthetic: “the antinomy between mind and body, word and deed, speech and silence, overcome. Everything is only a metaphor; there is only poetry” (266). For Brown, this submission to the void, to
Nothingness, is necessary not because it is the end but because it is the ground for true human freedom, for creation beyond limits.

The Rocket, created in part through rationalist modes of thought, is a type of submission to the irrationality of Nothingness. Its peculiar combination of the technological and mystical and its hope to overcome this division give it a monstrous quality in the novel. It is both associated with King Kong and the witch’s oven of Hansel and Gretel (not to mention Nazism). These fantastical creations are what the rational world produces but also represses. In an essay “Is it OK to Be a Luddite?” a 1984 essay published in the *New York Times*, Pynchon references other monsters who attempt to conquer rational technical systems. In the essay, Pynchon traces the historical development of the Luddites, focusing on the legend of “King Ludd” the nickname of a man Ned Lud who in 1779 broke into a house and “in a fit of insane rage” destroyed two knitting machines. After word got around, the phrase “Lud must have been here” was used to describe the random breakdown of machine. Ned thus became an irrational element, a ghost in the machine, that came to stand for the inability of rational machines to function perfectly. By the nineteenth century, Pynchon tells us King Ludd, immortalized by Lord Byron in his “Song for the Luddites,” came to stand for “all mystery, resonance and dark fun: a more-than-human presence, out in the night...” (43). Pynchon tracks the “long folk history” of King Ludd from Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* to *King Kong*, in the figure of “the Badass.” Dr. Frankenstein’s creation is the ultimate symbol of Badass in the novel, “the ultimate Luddite novel” (45). As Pynchon notes, neither Dr. Frankenstein’s method, nor the creation that results from this method is mechanical. This gives the novel its Luddite value, “for its attempt, through literary
means which are nocturnal and deal in disguise to deny the machine” (45). Both
Frankenstein and King Kong (“your classic Luddite Saint”) are part of a multiple
resistances to the regimes of the Age of Reason. Pynchon lists as examples William
Blake and the gothic novel and disparate schools of thought like Methodism and
Freemasonry: “Each in its way expressed the same profound unwillingness to give up
elements of faith, however ‘irrational,’ to an emerging technopolitical order that might or
might not know what it is doing” (46). In this sense, a faith in the “irrational” is a refusal
to submit to a “technopolitical order.” In his essay, Pynchon, like Adorno and Marcuse
and many other post-war writers, notes a major shift in the use of rationality after the
Manhattan Project and Auschwitz. But in his trickster-style, Pynchon laments why
writers have not yet come up with any “countercritter Bad and Big enough, even in the
most irresponsible of fictions, to begin to compare with what would happen in a nuclear
war” (48). It seems then that these monsters–Frankenstein, King Kong, and the Zone’s
Rocket–are the folk creatures that exist to save us from the horror of that our
technopolitical order has created. And yet these monsters can be horrifying themselves.
While critiques against the increasing rationalization of society, they can hardly be taken
as the best hopes for political liberation.

And yet there is a type of liberation from rationality in the Rocket. At the firing of
Rocket 00000, Steve Edelman, “Kabbalist spokesman,” likens it to the moment of the
creation of the universe: “At the creation, God sent out a pulse of energy into the void”
(768). The countdown is associated with the Tree of Life “which must be apprehended all
at once, together, in parallel” although we can only experience numbers serially (768).
And before he puts Gottfried into the Rocket, he tells him that after they will be
“gathered, inseparable, into the radiance of what we would become” (738). The dream of the Rocket for Blicero is not a death in orgasm, a temporary moment of stasis. Rather it is an affirmation of all, including the last negation of death. By submitting to death, Blicero can affirm it and can then “apprehend” all at once. This is not a momentary orgasm, but like Brown’s apocalyptic fire, a permanent state of orgasm. It is an experience of stasis that corresponds to a new order where old divisions are gathered into a single unity. An orgasm only pierces to this “order of the other side” momentarily; for Brown and Blicero the task is to align the orgasm and death to permanently cross into the order of Nothingness.

And who knows? Perhaps Blicero is right, but we are trapped on this side and so can never really know. From our view, the Rocket does not pierce gravity; it ascends and descends, but at the same time Blicero has “transcended,” and he and Gottfried have both moved into the “other realm” the realm controlled by “Them.” They have submitted to “Them,” but we don’t know whether they actually are experiencing the Final Zero as what they imagined. What we do know is that for those left on the ground, the Rocket returns. In the final pages, the Rocket, somehow traveling across space and time as do all potent symbols, falls into the theater in which we are watching the movie of the story we just read: “But it was not a star, it was falling, a bright angel of death” (775). What the rest of us experience is just plain old death in the Orpheus Theater, a name which promises transcendent pleasure but becomes the scene of our terror.

Part II: The Perceptible Hazards of Love and Attachment
The very elusiveness of pleasure allows its formless magic to be appropriated for many different purposes. In the Zone, there are few restrictions on sexual freedom and Pynchon presents us with all manners of eroticism from the loving to the exploitative and from the mundane to the truly unique. In this respect, pleasure’s association with chaos is demonstrated in the proliferation of networks, flows, connections and social assemblages in the Zone. The fact that pleasure contains more than just freedom demonstrates the double-edged nature of Eros. This double-edged character of Eros, also part of the Platonic and Freudian traditions, distinguishes the freedom of pleasure from attachment against the pleasure of attachment. Pleasure can foster togetherness, but it can also subvert or corrode it. In this respect, we can view the Zone as a type of anarchic laboratory for the emergence of new relations and social forms that unfold in a sudden collapse of social and moral order.

Though there is togetherness based on pleasure, most of these erotic assemblages in the novel do not qualify as “erotic communities” because they are not really communities. That is, there is little attachment or love between the participants in these communities; there is none of the “tenderness” that characterizes Miller’s self-regulating community. Additionally, they are generally not egalitarian or democratic and they often explicitly foster sexual exploitation (let alone condone hedonism). The novel, while filled with sexual pleasure and supposed intimacy is quite skeptical of love which often functions as a ruse for exploitation. Rather these erotic communities are more akin to

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92 In Pausanias’ speech in *The Symposium*, as a response to Phaedrus’ “army of lovers” speech extolling the virtues of Eros as attachment, he argues that Eros is inherently neither noble or base; rather: “So, too, in the case of loving and Eros, for Eros as a whole is not noble nor deserving of a eulogy, but only that Eros who provokes one to love in a noble way” (10). Noble for Pausanias is defined by object choice and intention. In Pynchon’s novel’s however, Eros is freed from such moral constraints, but noble and base Eros still exist in terms of its possibilities for freedom and egalitarianism.
“assemblage” in the Deleuzian sense. As William Connolly explains this term, “An assemblage is a temporal complex in which numerous or coexisting elements are simultaneously interinvolved, externally related, and jostled by flows that exceed these two modes of connection (12). In Connolly’s description, an assemblage has a manifold complexity, in which relations among entities are more than random but less than structurally determined. To name an assemblage is a way to analyze it, but this assemblage is never fully self-aware. That is, like Roger Mexico’s description of the War, it does not cohere together or define itself. I find that this is an apt description of the erotic assemblages in *Gravity’s Rainbow*. We can think of the entire Zone as an assemblage and isolate patterns within it, but we can never comprehensively or deterministically define the Zone. Rather, we can only attach a name to an assemblage and in so doing, we participate in what Pynchon calls “the sinister cartography of naming” (327). That is, in naming an assemblage we identify it and call it into being. With this naming though, we find that a name is always overdetermined, as in WASTE or the Rocket or paranoia. In this sense, it can mean different things to those among whom it names.

To name is also an act of power, a way to impose stasis on dynamic relational flows. In the erotic assemblages I discuss below, the name itself structures the community. That is, the members of these groups do not attach to each other and form a unit. Rather, their primary attachment is to the name of the group itself, which turns out to be an adherence to an ideology. These assembles are based more on member’s identification with a transcendent ideal or symbol than on relationships within the assemblage. Not only do these assemblages have weak attachments between their
members, but their adherence to a transcendent totem papers over their lack of attachment, self-determination and interpersonal ethics. As we see in the case of the Rocket itself, a totem can create togetherness, but it can also justify exploitation.

**An Army of Lovers Can Be Beaten**

In Phaedrus’ speech in Plato’s *Symposium*, he imagines a city or army composed of “lovers” and “beloveds.” Since both the lover and the beloved are shamed by the other, and each other’s shame is the worst shame for them to bear, neither would do shameful things. For Phaedrus Eros becomes a kind of mutual restraint: “for they would abstain from all that is shameful, and be filled with love of honor before one another” (8). The love of the lover and the beloved for each other regulates their behavior and also regulates the social structure itself. In this aspect, this city or army composed of lovers is self-regulating through its own horizontal ties of mutual restraint and affection. There is no need for authority or repression because “there is no better way for them to manage their city” than through the bonds of love between them (8). The concept promises a solidarity among members and a self-awareness of the group through the relations created through attachment (as well as through the disciplinary mechanisms of mutual shame).

That is, the army of lovers model of erotic communities sees potential for communal attachment in the relationship between lovers who regulate their world among themselves.

Most notably seen in *Hair*’s “holy orgy” this model was a popular countercultural ideal, but for Pynchon it is naïve. It does not take into account that erotic attachment requires the risk of exploitation in a world where no one is sure of any lover’s true
intentions. In Pynchon’s sixties novels, lovers are always under suspicion. The proliferation of epistemological quandaries about a lover’s intentions often prevents or weakens this attachment. As the relationship between Katje and Slothrop demonstrates, one cannot be sure of the fidelity of attachment even as one enjoys it. And as the relationship between Roger Mexico and Jessica demonstrates, one can easily get duped by love. If lovers cannot be trusted in a social world structured by indiscernible power relationships and shifting alliances, bonds become what the Soviet officer Tchitcherine calls “the perceptible hazard of love, of attachment” (343). Attachments are always risky because the characters can never really be sure that the attachment is not masking sinister attempts. And yet, Tchitcherine also realizes that attachments are strategically necessary and often useful. In this moment, Tchitcherine recalls the bonds he had with his former soldiers, his own army of lovers, “a mortal State that will persist no longer than the individuals in it” (343). Though the bond is temporary, it is strong:

He is bound, in love and in bodily fear, to students who have died under the wheels of his carriages, to eyes betrayed by nights without sleep and arms that have opened maniacally to death by absolute power. He envies their loneliness, their willingness to go it alone, outside even a military structure, often without support or love from anyone. (343)

Here Tchitcherine explains the collapse of social order after the war. Once bound together strongly by love and fear, these soldiers are now free to “go it alone.” Tchitcherine envies their freedom, but at the same time sees both power and comfort in connection. Realizing the need for comfort in intimacy, he has his own “network of fräuleins” around the Zone. But he realizes that he is taking a dangerous risk: “he knows there’s too much comfort in it, even when the intelligence inputs are good” (343). That is, Tchitcherine cannot escape the need for attachment as he realizes the potential hazards
and incalculable risks within it. He is erotically and affectively drawn to deep attachment but realizes that any one of his lovers could betray him. Tchitcherine thus arises at a compromise: he will have the women, but they cannot know each other. His women exist as a unit only for Tchitcherine and do not have any self-awareness; they are kept dispersed and uncoordinated because otherwise it would be too risky for him.

Tchitcherine finds himself caught: he envies his newfound postwar freedom and yet he cannot envision going it alone. This compromise requires a constant vigilance against the hazards of attachment.

In *The Crying of Lot 49*, the Inamorati Anonymous find these perceptible hazards of attachment so extreme, they shun connection altogether. Oedipa, finding herself on a guided tour of San Francisco night life, arrives in the middle of a gay bar where she meets a man with the muted-postal horn as his lapel pin. Oedipa asks him whether it is a homosexual sign, but he tells her it is for his membership in the Inamorati Anyonmous; he explains to her, “An inamorato is somebody in love. That’s the worst addiction of all” (91). The group sends counselors to love addicts on the verge of falling in love, but they can only meet once in case they begin to be attracted to each other. Oedipa asks if they hold meetings like Alcoholics Anonymous, but because the risk of attachment is so strong, they must be fully anonymous to each other. A member tells her, “You get a phone number, an answering service you can call. Nobody knows anybody else’s name; just the number in case it gets so bad you can’t handle it alone. We’re isolates...Meetings would destroy the whole point of it” (1). What is of course puzzling to Oedipa is why a member is so invested in promoting his lack of attachment in a crowded bar that is ripe with opportunities for connection. This paradox is the same as the group itself which is
bound together only in the transcendent ideal of disconnection. That is, like Tchitcherine’s army of lovers, there is no horizontal attachment; attachment exists only in vertical identification with an ideal.\textsuperscript{93} The muted-postal horn symbol itself creates the collective, who are bound together only through the idea it represents (though we also know it represents other ideas which may not be related at all to the IA). Attachment in this assemblage is through a member’s identification with iconic imagery which symbolizes a transcendent ideal. And yet this symbol is so overdetermined that Oedipa cannot be sure who or what idea it represents. Similar to the Rocket, the symbol must mean many different things to have wide resonance, “it must answer to a number of different shapes in the dreams of those who touch it” (741). The muted postal horn defines a community from transcendent iconography, giving identity to a loose assemblage of conflicting resonances. The irony of the IA reveals that just because togetherness can be identified does not mean it leads to strong attachment among its members.

We see this irony in another “army of lovers” of Weimar-era leftist radicals who are explicitly dedicated to erotic solidarity in \textit{Gravity’s Rainbow}.\textsuperscript{94} Dedicated to an opposite ideal of the IA, this group nonetheless mirrors its structure. The group, nostalgic for the October Revolution and Rosa Luxemborg in an era of leftist-decline, abandon dialectical thought in favor of a politics of Eros. During the orgy which seduces her into the collective, leftist Berliner Leni, who is in the process of separating from her rocket-

\textsuperscript{93} The fact that it is mistaken for a gay symbol makes a similar point insofar as homosexual identification does not necessarily create a homosexual community composed of horizontal attachments.

\textsuperscript{94} While this erotic assemblage exists before the Zone, it nonetheless reflects several elements of postwar erotic assemblages, notably a body of persons dedicated to an ideal in which attachment is defined by identity but there exists little horizontal attachment within the group.
engineering husband Franz, recalls: “Incredible joy at the baths, among friends. True joy: events in a dialectical process cannot bring this explosion of heart. Everyone is in love....” (161). And yet, immediately after that, Leni recalls the cryptic slogan she has seen painted on walls around the Red district: “AN ARMY OF LOVERS CAN BE BEATEN” (161). We are told that no one can track down the author or painter of the slogan and so the meaning is open for interpretation. However its authorship is “Enough to make you believe in a folk consciousness” (157). That is, the wall-posting, like the muted-postal horn and the Rocket, is a symbol that represents a formless “folk consciousness.” It represents a community of readers of the sign, but such a community is ambiguously defined. It becomes an overdetermined symbol that expresses an assemblage based on those who identify with the symbol but not necessarily a singular or bonded collective. Indeed, it is unclear whether this message is intended to support an army of lovers, oppose one, or provoke something else entirely. But for Leni, it names the group of which she is a part.

Furthermore, despite their claims to erotic solidarity, Leni finds that the leftist radicals do not do much to foster it. After her initial orgy, Leni finds that the members like Vanya make the argument that capitalist expressions of love are propaganda against the true “absolute comfort” of solitary masturbation. In Vanya’s argument “the self-induced orgasm” is an act against capitalism, which promotes love as a form of control. Leni, however does not buy this argument and tells Vanya that “I know there’s coming together” (158). “Coming together” here means both mutual orgasm and connection within mutual pleasure. Yet Leni also realizes that in her experience with her lackluster

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95 On this scene Maureen Quilligan writes: “Like the alphabet which translates the shaman’s magic into the political sphere, a holy text not only states a truth, but incites action” (101). And yet, the called-for action here is ambiguous.
lover Franz, one can also feel disconnected and alone under the pretense of coming
together. Still Leni holds onto this ideal. When Leni has sex with another member,
Rebecca, she experiences this “coming together” momentarily, but Rebecca immediately
leaves her, missing the post-sex tender moment when Leni falls into her “true infant
sleep” (159). Leni finds herself disillusioned with the leftist radicals’ mismatch between
their theory and their practice. While they are bonded together through identification with
an ideal, this ideal actually prevents them from coming together. Like Tchitcherine’s
network of women and the IA, they do not bond among each other; rather they exploit
each other’s desire for attachment, promising connection that only exists as an ideal but
never as a practice. Like IA, a transcendent ideal takes on a totemic character in the
slogan; through it the members’ identification alone gives shape to an assemblage. These
assemblages provides the illusion and comfort of attachment but function to prevent
attachment between the members.

**Orgies of Affirmation**

As we see in the above examples, for Pynchon, Eros is double-edged. It both
desires an attachment as it desires freedom from attachment. This freedom from social
attachment is seen most prominently in the orgy on the pleasure boat Anubis (which is
named after the Egyptian god associated with the afterlife). The height of pleasure in the
orgy is akin to Eros’ affirmation of All, a drive for an experience of stasis. At the climax
of the orgy, All is momentarily united and frozen in the moment of collective orgasm.
The orgy is focalized through Slothrop and begins with a kind of perverse stage act by
film star Margherita Erdmann “Greta” (Katje) and her “11 or 12” year old daughter
Bianca. Bianca is rumored to be the daughter of Hitler, but another rumor surfaces that Greta conceived Bianca in Nazi pornographic film: “Every man in the scene wears a black hood, or an animal mask....it became an amusing party game to speculate on who the child’s father was. One has to pass the time. They’d run the film and ask Bianca questions, and she had to answer yes or no” (469). One of Goebbels’s favorites, the film creates an erotic community, but this community only exists in the men’s identification with Nazism. The masked men do not attach to each other; their masks both prevent audience recognition and their recognition of each other. Their only connection to each other is through their positions of power over Greta and their participation in the conception of Bianca. In this sense, she is a child created by Nazi sexuality which seeks to unite All under a transcendent symbol. However, the symbol is not the swastika or the Rocket but Bianca herself.

As such, Bianca is represented as the epitome of erotic affirmation, combining childhood innocence with perversity. She is a totem for the orgy; she incorporates the erotic unity of contradictions and is represented by the participants as embodying pureness of defamed pleasure itself. She begins her act with a song “On the Good Ship Lollipop” in mimicry of Shirley Temple with Greta acting as her stage mother. The embodiment of both childhood innocence and the adult sexuality captivates the audience. As Slothrop notes “her delicate bare arms have begun to grow fatter, her frock shorter–is somebody fooling with the lights?” (483). But it is clear that the debasement of innocence is part of her act when Greta begins punishing her by putting Bianca over her knees and hitting her with a steel ruler. Slothrop narrates Greta’s explosion of anger on Bianca through the sexualized punishment:
It’s as if Greta is now releasing all the pain she’s stored up over the past weeks onto her child’s naked bottom...building up a skew matrix of pain on Bianca’s face. Tears go streaming down her inverted and reddening face, mixing with mascara, dripping onto the pale lizard surfaces of her mother’s shoes. (474)

The audience is captivated by the way Greta’s sexual act is an explosive liberation transformed into erotic violence. This release is characteristic of the orgy which reads as a collective unbridled liberation and in Brown’s words develops a “consciousness which does not observe the limit, but overflows; consciousness which does not negate any more” (Life 308). Indeed the orgy affirms a panoply of differences of race, gender, nationality, orientations, bodies and levels of consent. Slothrop’s disorientation is reflected in the narrative which moves from glance to glance describing snippets of the flowing assemblages of body parts. This narrative suddenly ends when Slothrop reaches orgasm, “and it feels, at least, like everybody came together, though how could that be?” (475). Slothrop notices a connection and an orgasmic correspondence that has eluded him (and his trackers). In this brief moment he is connected to the participants, united in radical affirmation. The orgy is built upon what Brown calls a “final unity,” the last act of affirmation of death. In that sense, the orgy-goers’ explosive orgasms are similar in that “one is united with the all, in an all consuming fire” (Life 308). Yet this moment of transcendent unity is fleeting; soon after there is a “general withdrawing from orifices” as people drift away and separate. The orgy in this sense delivers what it promises: a kind of pleasure that pierces through to “the order of the other side,” if only momentarily. The song which opens the orgy likens it to the moment on the Titanic after the iceberg breaks, “naughty ‘n’ noisy” (470). They will not sink, but they will get to touch the panic of immanent mass death as collective orgasm.
As with the muted-postal horn and the Rocket, here Bianca becomes the symbol by which the orgy-goers attach to each other. In this respect, the orgy is not much different than the scene of the pornographic video—in the center of the erotic experience is the embodiment of the final unity in Bianca. The participants, though sharing pleasure and physically connecting, are not really connected to each other; they are a fleeting assemblage like the masked men, a collective only in the sense of sharing pleasure through symbolic bodies. Pynchon does not find anything necessarily unethical about momentary fleeting pleasure and weak attachment—while “trivial eroticism” is often presented as horrific and exploitative in his work, it is sometimes presented as intimate, tender, and mutual. However the Anubis orgy substitutes the pleasure of antisocial release under the guise of sociality, but this sociality is built upon the mass identification with Bianca as a symbol of the final unity. In this sense, it is not much different than the Rocket and the fascism that produces it. Bianca’s sexual exploitation is at the center of this collective and yet they can still imagine themselves as connected, even experience the “coming together” Leni hopes for. Eros is pressed into the service of a collective anti-social experience built upon exploitation. An army of lovers has been beaten by its own hands.

**Something to Hold Onto**

Within the ungoverned libidinal energies of the Zone, pleasure easily slips into hedonism and terror. Furthermore, the general atmosphere of suspicion renders attachment hazardous. When residents of the Zone do band together, it is often under a

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96 Gottfried and Bianca are often aligned together in the text. They are not the same person, but for Thanatz, they both represent a loss “to the same winner,” Blicero (685).
transcendent ideal that provides the comfort of attachment but masks disconnection and exploitation. If the Zone promises liberation from former repression and the freedom to carve one own’s path, it is often portrayed as a battle of forces and wills bent on control. In this respect *Gravity’s Rainbow* seems to suggest that only chaos and terror can emerge from liberation. And yet, Leni *knows* there is still “coming together.” Indeed the end of the novel highlights moments of unexpected connections, like Katje’s meeting with Enzian, Ludwig’s reunion with his lost lemming Ursula, and Enzian’s near-missed connection with his half-brother Tchitcherine. In many ways the Zone, structured by shadowy and unknown forces, also contains the contingencies for loving attachment. Even when these connections fail, as in the case of Enzian and Tchitcherine, the mystic Geli Tripping notes, “This is magic. Sure—but not fantasy” (749). Magic is not a mystical realm of the other side; that is fantasy. Magic is in the here and now, the immanent proliferation of contingency and flows in the Zone which creates moments of connection where social contracts can be written anew. Pynchon does not want to suggest that erotic liberation is wholly dangerous or unnecessary, only that it has limits. Indeed, erotic liberation and sexual pleasure is a powerful realm for exploring one’s own freedom in the Zone. How then might one know these limits to affirmation?

At the end of the novel, in a conversation about their shared lover Blicero, Enzian relates to Katje a passage in Blicero’s (Weissman’s) diary:

> Her Masochism [Weissmann wrote from the Hague] is reassurance for her. That she can still be hurt, that she is human and can cry at pain. Because, often, she will forget...But of true submission, of letting go the self and passing into the All, there is nothing, not with Katje. (675)
While Gottfried submits to Blicero and the All, Katje sees her relationship with Blicero as part of a game, a strategy to get through the War. Unlike Gottfried and Blicero, Katje refuses to submit to the All because she still believes in a “World of Reality” and will not give up hope of rejoining someday (671). Katje’s refusal to submit is an act of rational negation. In his critique of Brown’s work in a 1967 exchange in *Commentary*, Marcuse defends negation and Reason against Brown’s vision of “the final union at the end of history” in which this world is annihilated (75). Marcuse argues that critical thought must maintain its place in *this* world, and so must always contain a conception of reality: “The way out may well be the subversion of this entire reality, but this subversion, in order to be real, must itself be real, look in the face of this reality, and not turn the head” (75). Marcuse finds that Brown’s embrace of affirmation shares the same hope of the Rocket, a transcendent movement away from this world to another order. And yet, Marcuse, like Pynchon wonders what about *this* world, “the very unmystical, antagonistic whole of our life...the only life that is” (75). Radical liberation, the pleasurable embrace of the All, estranges us from this world at the same time we are always and everywhere caught within it. As Marcuse notes, “all pleasure and all happiness and all humanity originate and live in and with these divisions and boundaries” (75). Additionally, another early critique of Brown’s work from Richard King’s *The Party of Eros* (1972) expresses the potential for the type of exploitation we see in the Anubis orgy, arguing that in Brown’s work, “Reality becomes one-dimensional and etherealized. And politically crucial, the procedure that makes no distinctions in thought or fact is potentially totalitarian” (171). Brown’s work, as King and Marcuse argue, merely replaces one one-dimensional regime with another, each attempting to eliminate a stance for negation. In his critique of Brown,
Marcuse offers not another reality, but another reality principle, a new basis for rational thought in our shared world, not an escape and abdication of responsibility toward it: “Critical, not absolute vision; a new rationality, not the simple negation of rationality” (75). For Marcuse, the creation of this new rationality is the work of political negotiation. Referencing Plato’s allegory of the cave, Marcuse charts out the political task, “Waking up from sleep, finding the way out of the cave is work within the cave; slow, painful work with and against the prisoners in the cave” (75). As we see in Gravity’s Rainbow, to advocate for an escape from this cave leaves “our fathers, our leaders, and representatives” to determine the lives of the prisoners of the cave in whatever way they choose (75). The work of criticism and politics, slow and painful as it may be, is the only way to change this world, which is the only one.

We see glimpses of this critical vision and an attempt to begin the “painful work” in the conversation between Katje and Enzian. When Katje seeks out Enzian to find out about Blicero’s end, the two seem to speak genuinely (the word is used several times in the passage). While we can never be sure in the novel when a character is being genuine, we have little reason to doubt either of them here. They do not stand to gain much from each other. Part of this seems to be a connection over their both having been loved by Blicero and having survived this brush with darkness: “Each had to arrive at some way of making it bearable, just bearable, for just long enough, one day by one...” (671). In the conversation Katje echoes Phaedrus’ claim about lovers:

The man wants to be decent. He leaves himself open. (So does she, but only because everything that might hurt has long been numbed out. There’s small risk for Katje). But Enzian risks what former lovers risk whenever the Beloved is present, in fact or in word: deepest possibilities for shame, for sense of loss renewed, for humiliation and mockery. Shall she mock? Has he made that too
easy—and then, turning, counted on her for fair play? Can she be as honest as he, without risking too much? (672).

Their moment of conversation is also a negotiation, but a negotiation that ends in a mutual understanding of the openness between them. They both risk the hazardous attachment of love. This risk is not much of one, of course, because neither has much left to lose; their bond is a bond of survivors, of Zone refugees. And yet, that does not mean that such connections are false or useless. Indeed, Pynchon seems to suggest, it may only be in exchanges like this that “genuine” connections can be made.

In the conversation, the two recall their “common friend” Slothrop about whom Katje feels guilt over the way she seduced and exploited him. While Enzian and Katje are not sexual toward each other (though they are flirty), Enzian reaches out to Katje and gives her a “friendly chin-up on the back of the hand” as he tells her: “There are things to hold to. None of it may look real, but some of it is. Really” (672). And yet what is real? Enzian and Katje share a belief in something “real,” though they both know that it is not to be found in the past and it is elusive in the present. This scene however, offers a kind of world-building in that Katje feels something “real” in her connection with Enzian:

They both start laughing. Hers is weary-European, slow, head-shaking. Once she would have been assessing as she laughed, speaking of edges, deeps, profit and loss, H-hours and points of no return—she would have been laughing politically, in response to a power-predicament, because there might be nothing else to do. But now she’s only laughing. As she once laughed with Slothrop, back at the Casino Hermann Goering. So she’s only been talking with Enzian about a common friend. Is this how the Vacuum feels? (672)

In this conversation about Slothrop, the two manage to forge a bond built upon something other than suspicion. Katje has let her guard down and is laughing authentically in the same way her facade is pierced by genuine laughter in her encounter with Slothrop
(discussed above). And yet this moment cannot be recaptured although it can be restaged with another. In this moment, the Vacuum of the Zone does not feel empty of connection, but rather in the Vacuum, Katje finds a new way to connect. We might note that this is not really an erotic community or assemblage in that it is a couple. And yet, the couple here is not necessarily exclusive (indeed, Slothrop and Blicero shadow it). Still, Pynchon seems to suggest here that any erotic community to be built on genuine attachment must not assume that genuine attachment, but it must create it through the slow and painful process of interpersonal negotiation. This moment of connection is fleeting for both, but it does signal to Katje that there is something to hold onto and that through this something, genuine connections can exist in the real world. There is something to hold onto, but we can only figure out what it is in negotiation with each other, which risks the hazardous attachment of love.
Chapter Three: Love is Another Country: Erotic Publics in Baldwin’s Sixties Writing

“The world in which we live is, after all, a reflection of the desires and activities of men. We are responsible for the world in which we find ourselves, if only because we are the only sentient force which can change it.” - Baldwin, No Name in the Street

James Baldwin, one of the twentieth century’s most famous expatriate writers, rarely writes about migration to America. This is unsurprising given that Baldwin’s writing centers around his deep ambivalence toward his native country. As best described in his essays, America expels Baldwin out and then draws him back in again and again. He can never completely escape America’s pull because it is part of the very condition of himself that he cannot and will not deny. This is why he must continually leave and test his real and imagined bonds to Americans. These bonds, a product of history, are never fully chosen, but they are nonetheless strong and deep; even if we turn our back on them, they still define us—more than we choose to realize. Why then, Baldwin might ask, would anyone willingly take on the burdens of becoming American?

And yet, there is something poetically hopeful about the short coda to Another Country (1962), which gives a brief account of the minor character Yves’ migration from France to New York, “into the city which the people from heaven had made their home” (436). This line, the last of the novel, seems out of sync with the rest of the novel’s exploration of the earthly and often tragic lives of deeply-flawed Americans haunted by their nation’s past. Yet, this line comes into focus more when we recall the title of the final book of the novel, “Toward Bethlehem,” referencing Yeats’ “Second Coming,” and its epigraph from Shakespeare’s Sonnet LXV: “How with this rage shall beauty hold a plea,/ Whose action is no stronger than a flower?” With these allusions, Baldwin
references difficult new beginnings; given his critique of innocence, new beginnings are often suspect in Baldwin’s novels. The end of the novel has thus divided critics, with some arguing that Yves’ coda represents an utopian hope of “another country.”97 Others argue that Yves is another example of a type of innocent European projecting his hopes of “another country” onto America, of which is he woefully ignorant.98

Lost in these discussions is the unique journey the coda describes. Yves is not only a new American immigrant, but he is a new type of immigrant—an erotic immigrant. Yves’ only connection to America, and his chief reason for moving to it, is his American lover Eric. Yves and Eric are described as being “home” for each other, “but each was, for the other, the dwelling place that each had despaired of finding” (184). If we look at the history of the Greenwich Village bohemia that comprises the characters of the novel, we can see how their paths to New York diverge quite significantly from Yves’. Rufus and Ida, who grew up in Harlem, and whose recent ancestors come from the South, are descendants of slaves forced to America by the families of early European settlers like those of Eric and Cass. If these two groups represent a deep and troubled American past, the descendants of more recent immigrants—Vivaldo, Richard and Ellis—speak to the immigrant narrative of American freedom and economic opportunity, perhaps representing those “innocent Europeans.” However, Yves does not quite fit any of these typical American migrations of slavery, colonialism, or European immigration. Tellingly, as Yves flies into New York, he hopes to see the Statue of Liberty, the national symbol of immigration for a generation of Americans; however, he has already been warned it could

97 See particularly Susan Feldman and James Dievler.
98 Magdalena Zaborowska argues that this is Baldwin’s interpretation. Baldwin wrote “I spent the whole book trying to convey what this innocent European was going to get himself into” (Leeming 205).
not be seen from his flight plan. Nevertheless, he searches for it from his seat, knowing it is out there somewhere.

Yves’ arrival on a trans-Atlantic jet that bypasses the traditional icon of entry into America underscores the contemporaneity of his immigration to America. Embodying some of the rapidly changing possibilities for homosexual relationships and travel in the early 1960s, Yves represents the new historical possibilities for erotic attachment. Nationality, while still relevant and potent, gives way to new chosen forms of affiliation and group identity. The ending of the novel shows a new world-historical development: lovers can now make their own country detached from geography, as Baldwin’s signature of “Istanbul, Dec. 10, 1961” reinforces. For Baldwin, as for these lovers, the ability to travel great distances, though it does not erase American identity, opens up the possibility that new identities and attachments may be based on something other than geography and nationality. If love in the novel is as the character Vivaldo puts it, a country that we can know nothing about, this country is not a geographical space; it exists primarily as a conceptual one (296). The “another country” of love is not just an undiscovered realm, but another social world built of intimacy loosed from the constraints of space and nation.

And yet, Baldwin asks in this novel and throughout his work, if we imagine love as another country, what does that mean for those in the very real country of America? Yves’ and Eric’s separate entries both describe this real country through descriptions of crowds where interpersonal detachment reigns. When Yves arrives into New York, he notes, “the people of this planet sprang out of the ground, pushing trucks and waving arms and crossing roads and vanishing into, or erupting out of buildings” (433). There is a chaos and overflow of people whose uncoordinated movements are impossible for Yves
to track. Yves finds that group attachment and alliances are unstable in this environment. The camaraderie of passengers on his flight evaporates the moment they begin to disembark: “And [Yves] felt their movement away from him, decently but definitely, with nervous, and, as it were, backward smiles; they were making it clear that he could make no appeal to them, for they did not know who he was” (434). It is not only Yves’ Frenchness that separates him from the passengers; he finds that what for the duration of a flight can feel like strong communal attachment evaporates as the passengers politely detach from their former connection. When Eric leaves Yves a few months earlier by boat, he notes something similar about the residences of New York:

Their very walk, a kind of anti-erotic, knee-action lope, was a parody of locomotion and of manhood. They seemed to be shrinking away from any contact with their flamboyantly and paradoxically outlined private parts. They seemed—but could it be true? and how had it happened?—to be at home with, accustomed to, brutality and indifference, and to be terrified of human affection. In some strange way they did not seem to feel that they were worthy of it. (231)

This crowd does not cohere except in the conformity of their walk. The very terror over their own sex speaks of a lack of connection, a terror of affection and belonging. And yet their sex is on display, occupying a prominent place in public through dress; it is a private denial publicly shared. However, while they are similar, there is a crucial difference between Eric’s and Yves’ arrival. When Eric arrives, he is lonely and disconnected, not sure that he has any friends left in the city. However when Yves arrives, he knows Eric will be waiting for him. Unlike Eric’s despair and feeling of disconnection, Yves finds that Eric’s presence organizes the mass of bodies, gives meaning and shape to the crowd. Though he cannot locate him immediately after disembarking, “Still, he knew that Eric was there, somewhere in that faceless crowd, waiting for him, and he was filled, all at
once, with an extraordinary peace and happiness” (433). The couple’s erotic attachment gives way here to a larger one that can encapsulate the crowd as well.

Baldwin’s novels force us to confront their characters’ relationship to a larger social world, but they also tell the stories of these social worlds, these erotic communities ambivalently bonded by love. Another Country is similar to Badwin’s previous novels in focusing its attention on the relations between characters rather than on the characters themselves.\textsuperscript{99} There is no clear protagonist in Another Country; while Rufus is at the center of the web of characters, it is the stories about the erotic community that is built around his death that comprises the central plot of the novel. Even in his 1968 novel Tell Me How Long the Train’s Been Gone, the only one of Baldwin’s novels to be narrated in first-person, the protagonist Leo Proudhammer’s voice is often subordinated to the detailed description of social groupings. In this chapter, I argue that in these two novels, Baldwin highlights the ability of Eros to structure social worlds distinct from the traditional erotic bonds that comprise American culture. If America is already an erotic community in that it binds its citizens by nationality and history, then Eros does not provide a way to escape this American attachment. Rather, it presents a way of re-imagining it by replacing a relational structure of domination with one based on reciprocity and mutuality. Love in this sense is not only a relational or personal ethic, but it is also a social and political one. That is, in these two novels Baldwin imagines how a political public can, as he puts it in The Fire Next Time, “act like lovers.” They explore how America could become another country built upon attachments transformed through a process of love. As I argue below through a discussion of the similarities between his

\textsuperscript{99} This is certainly true for his novels after Another Country and his first Go Tell it On the Mountain. I would argue that Giovanni's Room is also as much interested in the social worlds of expatriates and homosexuals in France as it is with its ostensible protagonist David’s plot.
and philosopher Hannah Arendt’s ideas, Baldwin sees in Eros the capacity to imagine an erotic public (those who are “relatively conscious”) that can emerge within America. Love is not only a model for ethical attachment, but is a viable process for a new form of politics and a new understanding of the social world.

However, before I get to this argument, we need to understand how the model of love Baldwin proposes is distinct from those of his contemporaries interested in sexual revolution. For Baldwin, love cannot be reduced to desire or affection. Baldwin sees Eros as encompassing not only instinct and interpersonal connection; he sees it as a process of negotiation with others within the social world. In *The Fire Next Time* (1962), Baldwin describes his use of “love” not as describing a state of being or grace nor in the “infantile American sense of being made happy”; rather, he defines love as a process of change in concert with others, “the tough and universal sense of quest and daring and growth” (341). Love is not just an affect; its ambiguity and elusiveness make it a process of undetermined change and interpersonal negotiation. In *The Devil Finds Work* Baldwin calls this the “the changing motion of conquest and surrender, which is love” (530). Love is not deterministic; it heads nowhere on its own. But Baldwin argues, it does necessitate negotiation between lovers who always exist in the social world and who shape the social world. That is, love is distinct from domination in that it opens up a vulnerability between lovers which gives them the ability to recreate the social world. Lovers, never detached from the social world must negotiate a future for each other, together. In the words of *Another Country*’s character Vivaldo, love is “another country of which we know nothing about,” because it is a realm of open possibility that must negotiate the future with the
weight of the past. This negotiation is the work of the democratic participation of lovers who shape the world they have been given.

Given Baldwin’s descriptions of love as a complex process of social negation, he was deeply critical of much the sixties discourse of sexual revolution and sexual liberation. In Baldwin’s mind, these theories often represented a pernicious type of American innocence, a willful denial of the social world’s implication in structuring our desires. In them, Baldwin saw a veneration of sex for pleasure’s sake which turned one away from the social-political world. Sex in the counter-culture is merely an escape rather than what it could be—a moment for reciprocal engagement with others. In this respect, Baldwin mirrors the concerns over sexual revolution as hedonism; yet at the same time, he is not willing to let go of the political valence of sexual desire. As in the case with Yves and Eric, within sexual desire, Baldwin also finds the potential for new attachments, reconciliation, and intimacy that is not bound to the bedroom or its lovers. And yet these social and political potentials only arise in sex if it is also an act of love. Eros creates the opportunity for relationships of mutuality and reciprocity necessary for imagining and shaping the social world together, but it does so only if it remains within a social world of attachment.

The Innocence of the Orgasm

As we saw in Chapter One, sexuality in the counter-culture is privileged as a realm of authenticity apart from the conformity and alienation of postwar mass society. As critics such as Mary Esteve have pointed out, “expressive or experimental
authenticity” was the favored remedy for alienation among the counter-culture (324).\textsuperscript{100} The political promise of authenticity relied on its supposed distinction from the social world around it. In the counter-culture, authenticity is figured as existing outside the social world and is a realm of privacy where the social realm should not tread.\textsuperscript{101} In such a society characterized by conformity and the loss of individuality, Hannah Arendt argued that the promise of escape is limited to form of antisocial rebellion: “The rebellious reaction against society during which Rousseau and the Romantics discovered intimacy was directed first of all against the leveling demands of the social, against what we would call today the conformism inherent in every society” (39). In Arendt’s eyes, Rousseau and the Romantics preserve the “intimacy of the heart” as a realm outside of the society. And yet, Arendt finds that the possibility for the privacy of the “intimacy of the heart” is based on the very conditions of the social world. Similar to Marcuse’s concept of “repressive desublimation,” it is an escape which in fact reinforces the social power over the individual. Baldwin goes further than Arendt in arguing that the appeal of authenticity is a type of “innocence,” a willful denial of one’s inextricability to the social-historical. Such innocence is not only irresponsible but potentially monstrous. Innocence protects the moral high-mindedness of our authenticity at the same time it alienates us further from the social world. As he writes in “Stranger in the Village,” “People who shut their eyes to reality simply invite their own destruction, and anyone who insists on remaining in a state of innocence long after that innocence is dead turns himself into a monster” (128-129). Baldwin’s ideas of innocence are often expressed, as they are in

\textsuperscript{100} See also Doug Rossinow’s book \textit{The Politics of Authenticity} which links the politics of cultural authenticity to the New Left as well.

\textsuperscript{101} John D’Emilio and Elizabeth Freeman argue that beginning in the 1920s, sexuality was increasingly tied to individual happiness and self-fulfillment in American culture (241).
“Stranger in the Village,” as a refusal to engage one’s inextricability with the historical and social realities of racism and oppression.

Baldwin also used this concept to explore sexual revolution itself as a form of innocence. Baldwin addressed sexual revolution in several essays, particularly at the end of the 1960s and up to his death in the 1980s. Baldwin finds that sixties discourses of sexual revolution often denied its inextricability with the larger social world. Despite their aims of social transformation, in their lack of engagement with the social world, sexual revolutionaries retreat in the private realm and escape from social realities. For example in the essay “Take Me to the Water” in *No Name in the Street*, Baldwin in looking back on the 1960s writes:

There comes floating up to me, out of a life I lived long ago—during the cybernetics craze, the William Reich misapprehension, the Karen Horney precisions, that time, predating Sartre, when many of my friends vanished into the hills, into anarchies called communes, or into orgone boxes, never to be seen, and certainly never to make love again—the memory of a young white man, beautiful, Jewish, American, who ate his wife’s afterbirth, frying it up in a frying pan. He did this because—who knows?—Wilhelm Reich, according to him, had ordered it. (384)

Baldwin’s tone here is flip and cutting, mocking the blinding trendiness of such sexual revolutionary movements. But he also finds a peculiarly American desperation for connection that ironically prompts disconnection from the larger social world. These activities bring his friends away from the social world; they “vanish” into the hills and their communes and orgone boxes. Baldwin makes little distinction between the singular experience of the orgone box and the group attachments of communes, but this distinction does not matter to him. In the “glorification of the orgasm,” he finds that regardless of the method they choose to venerate the orgasm, these friends “never make
love again.” That is, they have traded the glorification of the orgasm as a way to avoid all the complications entailed in making love in a social world. Baldwin finds that their “emotional poverty,” this deep terror of human touch, is so deeply a part of American culture that “virtually no American appears able to achieve any viable organic connection between his public stance and his private life” (385). That is, there is little correspondence between intimate and social life; in their opposition, sex only makes sense as an escape from social attachment. For Baldwin, sexual revolution and liberation become an antisocial retreat into the privacy of the orgasm.

In his 1961 essay “The New Lost Generation” published in *Esquire*, Baldwin finds that the “discovery of the orgasm” elevates pleasure over attachment. In their adherence to an easy “formula” for living, the new lost generation misses out on experiencing and participating in the real social world. He writes: “people turned from the idea of the world being made better through politics to the idea of the world being made better through psychic and sexual health like sinners coming down the aisle at a revival meeting” (662). In their religious adherence to the dogma of the orgasm, Baldwin argues that they shift from a politics of democratic participation to a politics that turns inward, a politics of the self that retreats into the private as a space of authenticity. Baldwin here is not critiquing the idea of “the personal is political”; he simply does not see any political relevance in this turn inward. The glorification of the orgasm does not lead his friends toward health or well being, nor does it make them anymore open to the

After this line, Baldwin writes: “‘Only connect,’ Henry James has said. Perhaps only an American writer would have been driven to say it, his very existence being so threatened by the failure, in most American lives, of the most elementary and crucial connections” (385). Unfortunately, Baldwin makes a mistake in ascribing the line to James, when it is really from E.M. Forster’s *Howard’s End*. Nevertheless Baldwin finds something peculiarly American about the inability to make “elementary and crucial” connections, but evidently this failure of connection is not limited to national borders.
world around them: “They had not become more generous but less, not more open, but more closed. They ceased, totally, to listen and could only proselytize, nor did their private lives become discernibly less tangled” (662). The dogma of the orgasm brings them back into themselves, closing them off from reciprocal dialogue. Baldwin even questions whether these “formulas” make more and better orgasms (“Who decides?” he asks). And he questions whether the orgasm has any relevance to social love: “The people I had been raised among had orgasms all the time, and still chopped each other up with razors on Saturday nights” (662). The glorification of the orgasm does not lead one to empathy or necessarily any type of relationship or exchange with others.

Yet at the same time, Baldwin sees something prescient and compelling in the flower children of Haight-Ashbury in “To Be Baptized” in No Name in the Street. He finds the flower children have a desperate desire for love, being tormented by the hope of it. He does not quite blame the flower children for this desperate need for erotic attachment and community: “They had been born into a society in which nothing was harder to achieve, in which perhaps nothing was more scorned and feared than the idea of the soul’s maturity” (467). The hippies have a “blind and moving need to become organic, autonomous, loving and joyful creatures; their desire to connect love, joy, and eroticism, so that all flowed together as one” (469). And yet they realized “they were themselves the issue of a dirty joke, the dirty joke which has been hidden at the heart of the legend of the Virgin birth” (46). That is, their rebuke to society is to expose this secret and publicly embody the symptoms of sexual repression. Baldwin finds this childish reveling in taboo is really a desperate search for meaning and connection. Because they grew up in a culture which prevents loving connection, in their wholesale repudiation of
the world around them, they do not really have the maturity that makes love possibles (467).

In reflecting on the sexual revolution in a 1985 essay “Freaks and the American Ideal of Manhood” in Playboy, Baldwin writes, “There seems to be a vast confusion in the Western world concerning these matters, but love and sexual activity are not synonymous. Only by becoming inhuman can the human being pretend that they are” (814). In Baldwin’s mind, American sexual confusion is rooted in the ideal of American masculinity, which can only conceive of desire as a play between domination and subordination that prevents love between or among men: “That men have an enormous need to debase other men—and only because they are men—is a truth which history forbids us to labor” (No Name 392). In America, this competitive need for sexual debasement that characterizes male-male relationships also characterizes black-white relationships; they are implicated for Baldwin in the same structure of desire. Baldwin makes an argument similar to Eve Kosofksy Sedgwick’s Between Men, which argues that the hierarchical relationships between men prevent horizontal types of attachment or bonding. In America, the desires of men are not for attachment, but derive from a need to debase or be debased in sex. It is the very absence of horizontal connection and love that characterizes the desire of American masculinity.

Yet at the same time, Baldwin finds that homosexual subcultures do not reconnect sexual activity with love. For example, in Another Country, Eric only really “sees”

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103 I use the term “homosexual” here for two reasons. Firstly, it is the term Baldwin uses most often when describing male same-gender love. Secondly, I want to maintain the historical particularity of Baldwin’s understanding of “homosexual.” There are many differences between Baldwin’s understanding of mid-century homosexuals culture and our contemporary understanding of gay male culture, although I am also mindful of Sedgwick’s warning that there isn’t a unified homosexuality “as we know it today” (Epistemology 45). The most important
men in public: “If Eric saw girls at all, he saw mainly their clothes and hair; they were not for him, as were the boys, creatures in a hierarchy, to be adored or feared or despised” (200). That is, Eric can only see desire in the social world through hierarchy; his very desires are structured by it. To love other men is to become vulnerable for him: “For the act of love is a confession. One lies about the body but the body does not lie about itself; it cannot lie about the force which drives it. And Eric had discovered, inevitably, the truth about many men, who then wished to drive Eric and the truth together out of the world “ (212). In Baldwin’s formulation of homosexual desire in a masculinist culture, to love other men is to become vulnerable and weak; male-male love risks debasement by other men. This prevents the bonding between the homosexuals who risk debasement in acknowledging any affection toward men. When Vivaldo visits Eric he tells him of a gay bar near a longshoreman’s bar in his neighborhood: “The longshoremen never go to the gay bar and the gay boys never go to the longshoremen’s bar—but they know where to find each other when the bars close, all up and down this street. It seem very sad to me...” (333). Eric describes an economical exchange between trade and queers taking place in back-alleys, devoid of risky attachment. Baldwin finds this a lamentable aspect of homosexual subcultures in which orgasm is structured on a social premise that prevents love, but allows sex, between men.

difference for our purposes is that the culture Baldwin describes is underground, secretive, and characterized primarily by an active/passive understanding of homosexuality. That is, as the story about Vivaldo and his friends raping and beating a “queer” in Another Country demonstrates, in the early 1960s a man could be considered heterosexual as long as he was the active partner. Vivaldo and his friend would not be considered to be expressing homosexual desire. Rather, they are here expressing a heterosexual masculinity’s need to debase other men by terming them queers and faggots. Baldwin does not see “brotherhood” in homosexual communities because it is characterized by this hierarchical play and secrecy. It is not until the later 1960s and 1970s gay liberation movements that these ideas of brotherhood and equality emerged as a widespread ideal in American gay communities.
In the “Male Prison” (1954), an essay on André Gide’s novel Madeline and Gide’s own homosexuality, Baldwin claims that Gide should have kept his homosexuality hidden from view. For his taste, Gide’s homosexuality is both too explicit and rendered too “disturbed.” Homosexuality, rather than breaking open the male prison of rigidly constructed masculinity, further encloses Gide. This is because Gide attempts to have his pleasure without “paying for it” through the messiness of a relationship with a lover. Gide’s desire instead becomes merely a search for narcissistic pleasure which “grows more steadily more desperate and more grotesque” (234). For Gide and other “present day” homosexuals (we need only to think of Jacques in Giovanni’s Room), sex becomes a futile and deadening endeavor of meaningless conquests:

The really horrible thing about the phenomenon of present-day homosexuality...is that today’s unlucky deviate can only save himself by the most tremendous exertion of all his forces from falling into an underworld in which he never meets either men or women, where it is impossible to have either a lover or a friend, where the possibility of genuine human involvement has altogether ceased. When this possibility has ceased, so has the possibility of growth. (234)

The problem with the homosexual is that in his pursuit of sex, he finds that he has not found actual people; the pursuit of sex makes it impossible to really connect as a lover or a friend and abstracts him from the world of human affairs. For Baldwin the underworld of gay sex does not create a Whitmanesque camaraderie between its lovers but disconnects them from each other; it creates a world where each only explores their own private drives. The prison metaphor in the essay is less about curtailment on freedom than the prison’s separation from the outside world.

However, as much as Baldwin critiques homosexual subcultures, he does not necessarily have any problem with homosexual desire. Throughout his novels, homosexual desire often functions as a potent force for reconciliation between men, even
when the men do not necessarily identify as homosexual.\textsuperscript{104} Homosexual desire opens up the possibility for men to relate to each other in mutual and reciprocal ways. For example in \textit{Tell Me How Long the Train’s Been Gone}, after Caleb, Leo’s older brother, comes home emotionally wounded and defeated from the Army and “no longer good for love,” the two share an intimate moment. Finding that he could sense his brother’s broken heart, Caleb reaches out to him:

\begin{quote}
We were doing nothing very adventurous, really, we were only using our hands and, of course, I had already done this by myself and I had done it with other boys: but it had not been like this because there had been no agony in it, I had not been trying to give, I had not even been trying to take, and I had not felt myself, as I did not, to be present in the body of the other person, had not felt his breath as mine, his sighs and moans, his quivering and shaking as mind, his journey as mine. (211)
\end{quote}

Sex here involves a reciprocity and mutuality in which each body is permeable to the other, and each, as Baldwin writes in \textit{The Fire Next Time}, creates the consciousness of the other within his own mind. This scene also recalls the Freudian Eros desire to bond or fuse individuals together, making “one out of more than one.” The fact that the two are brothers fosters this fusion of bodies and consciousness, something Leo has not experienced on his own nor with other boys. The hierarchical relationship of the brothers is relatively equal; the absence of hierarchy in the sex act allows this reciprocal relationship. I do not mean to suggest that it is only within incest that Baldwin provides the possibility of sex to be a profound experience of love; it is \textit{even within} incest that love can be a reparative and redemptive act.\textsuperscript{105} This is of course not the only place that

\textsuperscript{104} We might think here of Vivaldo and Rufus or Vivaldo and Eric in \textit{Another Country} and Peanut and Red in \textit{Just Above My Head} as examples of sex between men who do not identify as “homosexual.”

\textsuperscript{105} In Lynn Orilla Scott’s view, Baldwin’s emphasis on eroticized brotherhood presents a challenge to black nationalist homophobia (60).
Baldwin details erotically inclined love between real and imagined “brothers” and Baldwin’s recurring interest in “brotherly love” here is as a way to describe how sex and love may coincide.\textsuperscript{106} That is, if the homosexual’s failure is his inability to connect love with sex, then the relationship of brothers seems for him a way to rethink attachments based on relationships other than domination. Brotherhood is an existing relational concept that Baldwin uses to give a social shape and form to mutual desire that is absent in most other relational forms. Baldwin does not necessarily want biological brothers to have sex but for homosexuals to embrace brotherhood as a pathway to the social love they cannot find elsewhere. Brotherhood, through a popular ideal in the Civil Rights movement and within Student for Democratic Society, I would argue is ultimately not the erotic model that Baldwin promotes in his novels.\textsuperscript{107} However, like the ideal of sisterhood later does for feminist and lesbians in the sixties and seventies, the concept of brotherhood functions as a way to rethink sexual desire outside of hierarchical structures of desire. Yet, in the single-sex nature of each Baldwin finds a limitation for fully engaging within a social world where gender distinction and cross-gender desire are the norm; the ideals of brotherhood that we see with Leo and Caleb ultimately exist as a realm apart from the social world.

Ultimately, Baldwin’s critique of sexual revolution finds that sex easily colludes with fantasies of innocence. The elevation of the orgasm to a private or antisocial realm too easily leads to disconnection from attachment under the guise of liberation. It is

\textsuperscript{106} We see intense erotic connection between brothers implicitly in \textit{Sonny’s Blues} and in \textit{Just Above My Head}. Joanna Jeskova has argued that Baldwin advocates an incestuous or “brotherly” love between black and white Americans.

\textsuperscript{107} Marianne DeKoven argues that appeals to brotherhood in the Students for Democratic Society are more focused on ideals of free self-determination and individual authenticity which reinforce the concept of “man” (133).
innocence not in terms of a lack of culpability, but a willful denial of past and present social realities. As such innocence is a type of disconnection, a retreat into an outside or private realm. As political theorist and Baldwin critic Lawrie Balfour writes, “Embodied in the dream of clean hands and clean breaks, innocence impedes engagement with the difficulties of living” (88). That is, sexual liberation fails as a political or social act because its dream of clean hands and clean breaks abstracts sex from the social world. And on a personal level, the costs of sex without connection are extreme for Baldwin and point to a desperate search for attachment but without vulnerability. In his writing on homosexuals, Baldwin finds that the types of connections, because they are made in secret and in dark alleys are “outside” the social world. And yet, Baldwin finds that they are structured by the same hierarchical structure of desire that characterizes masculinity in the larger world. That is, there is no love and little possibility for attachment in them because homosexual subcultures recreate the hierarchical-based desires of the larger world. As such, Baldwin argues that desire is always located within a social and historical matrix; to imagine otherwise is to subscribe to the innocence of liberation.

**Borrowed Heirlooms**

It was not only in the orgasm that white radicals and liberals sought out the authenticity of the “intimacy of the heart.” Throughout the late 1950s and 1960s, as we see in the counter-culture’s interest in Asian spirituality and culture, non-white and non-Western ways of life were seen as providing a more authentic, sensual way of life that stood in opposition to anti-sexual white America. This is particularly true in Norman Mailer’s 1957 essay “The White Negro.” Caught between the “threat of instant death by
atomic destruction” and a “slow death by conformity,” Mailer looks into the “rebellious imperatives of the self” and discovers blackness:

A totalitarian society makes enormous demands on the courage of men, and a partially totalitarian society makes even greater demands, for the general anxiety is greater. Indeed if one is to be a man, almost any kind of unconventional action often take disproportionate courage. So it is no accident that the source of Hip is the Negro, for he has been living on the margin between totalitarianism and democracy for two centuries. (213)

On the margins—not fully outside, but not fully inside society either—Mailer finds black Americans’ position points to a legacy of authenticity at the margins of white culture. Caught in a society in which he is subject to the prospect of daily violence, Mailer’s Negro is faced with a choice of “constant humility or ever threatening danger,” takes the third route of survival by living in the present for the “obligatory pleasures of the body” (214). As critic Brandon Gordon has argued, Mailer’s hipsterism is motivated by a desire to inhabit the black body as a method of liberation (75). Mailer’s black body is the authentic body searching for “an orgasm more apocalyptic than the one that preceded it” (xx). In short, Mailer’s Negro is both teacher of and signifier of the orgasm: “For jazz is the orgasm, it is the music of orgasm, good orgasm and bad, and so it spoke across the nation” (214).

Evidently in the late 1950s the orgasm needed to be spoken to the nation. Mailer was not the only American writer who turned to black America for the thrill of the orgasm. In On the Road (1957), Jack Kerouac’s protagonist Sal Paradise hopes to find an alternative to the numbing effects of postwar middle-class life. As he walks through Denver, he wishes he were anything but a “white man disillusioned.” The best that the white world could offer him is “not enough ecstasy for me, not enough life, joy, kicks, darkness, music, not enough night” (180). For Paradise and Mailer’s hipster, whiteness
represents the entire social structure of postwar America. The System for them is not primarily identified by its rationalization or automatization, but for its specifically white dullness—the white world is conforming, anti-sexual, staid and boring. If the only choice in this state of affairs is acceptance or disillusionment, Mailer and Kerouac find that blackness offers them a mode of rebellion because it is less subject to these white constraints on sexuality.

Similarly in *An Essay on Liberation* (1969) Marcuse finds potential elements of rebellion in American blackness. He finds that rebellion may be strongest in those who have “remained outside” the “affirmative, sublimating, and justifying magic” of one-dimensional society. Black Americans are a potent revolutionary force because they have “lived in the shadows of this culture,” yet they too have been victims of one-dimensional society’s power structure, even more so than whites (49). He tracks a counter-Enlightenment tradition in the music of rebels who defined “their own humanity against the definitions of the masters” (46). Marcuse finds that historically this music has been associated with Africa and the American South of slavery:

In the subversive, dissonant, crying and shouting rhythm, born in the ‘dark continent’ and in the ‘deep South’ of slavery and deprivation, the oppressed revoke the Ninth Symphony and give art a desublimated, sensuous form of frightened immediacy, moving, electrifying the body, and the soul materialized in the body. Black music is originally music of the oppressed, illuminating the extent to which the higher culture and its sublime sublimations, its beauty, have been class-based. (47)

If in *Eros and Civilization*, Marcuse is searching for an aesthetic mode that speaks to libidinal rationality, in *An Essay on Liberation* he finds this mode in black music. As a space of negation to the dominant culture, black culture provides an alternative social logic in its embrace of the sensual body. Marcuse finds in black militants a “systematic
linguistic rebellion” in which blacks take over the most sublime and sublimated concepts within Western civilization and redefine them:

For example, the ‘soul’ (in its essence lily-white ever since Plato), the traditional seat of everything that is truly human in man, tender, deep, immortal—the world which has become embarrassing, corny, false in the established universe of discourse, has been desublimated and it this transubstantiation, migrated to the Negro culture; they are soul brothers; the soul is black, violent, orgiastic; it is no longer in Beethoven, Schubert, but in the blues, in jazz, in rock ‘n’ roll, in “soul food.” (35)

For Marcuse, black culture is not merely a culture built out at the margins of one-dimensional society; it is fundamentally a culture of rebellion built in reaction to increasing rationality. If the foundational act of Western philosophy was the subordination of Eros to Logos, then in Marcuse’s mind, the modern idea of the soul is akin to Eros. In the above passage, Marcuse envisions a historical continuity of Eros through Plato to Romantic anti-Enlightenment ideas of the soul to black American music and culture. For Marcuse, every Western-rational culture has defined the soul as what is authentically human—what is tender, deep, immortal—and has opposed itself to this; yet this “soul” cannot be extinguished. In the late sixties, Marcuse, always on the lookout for new potential sources of rebellion, saw black militancy as a potent force because of its connection to “soul,” its embodiment of Eros, its commitment to rebellion against rationalized thought.

Baldwin responded to this widespread argument for white appropriation of sexualized black culture, specifically excoriating Mailer and Kerouac, in his essay “The Black Boy Looks at the White Boy” (1961). In the essay, Baldwin argues that these white hipsters are not searching for the Negro at all, nor do they ever expect to find him. The White Negro has projected onto the Negro what he sees as “outside” of white America— a
model of primitive authenticity, what Baldwin calls in the essay “borrowed heirlooms” of an antique version of black life (277). Baldwin finds in the white writers’ refusal to see their own implications in the hyper-sexualized construction of blackness a kind of innocence. They project an inaccurate, caricatured image of black life that reveals more about their fantasies of blackness than it defines blackness. In this sense, Baldwin’s critique mirrors Kate Millet’s critique of Henry Miller and Mailer in *Sexual Politics*. In Millet’s conception, white male sexual liberation ignores its collusion with the sexual power dynamic of male/female. For Baldwin, the white hipsters overlook the fundamental sexual power dynamic of white/black. Mailer and Kerouac believe they have solved this power dynamic by appropriating “black” values, but they fail to see how their very idea of black values derives from their own white desire. This black desire is structured by white desire’s confrontation with blackness; white desire and black desire are historically intertwined and constituted (albeit unequally) by each other. To privilege black sexuality over white sexuality has little to do with addressing or untangling the conflicts between them. Mailer and Kerouac are merely another symptom of this American mythology of their distinction which preserves the power dynamic whereby black sexuality is determined by whites. As he asks in the essay, “Why malign the sorely menaced sexuality of Negroes in order to justify the white man’s own sexual panic?” (278)

However, other black writers like Ishmael Reed and Eldridge Cleaver had little problem with white interest in and appropriation of black culture. In Cleaver’s essay

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108 Reed in his “Neo-HooDoo Manifesto” writes, “In Theodore Roszak’s book *The Making of a Counter Culture*—there is barely any mention of the Black influence on this culture, even though its members dress like Blacks talk like Blacks walk like Blacks, gesture like Blacks wear Afros and indulge in Black music and dance (Neo-HooDoo)” (20-21).
“The White Race and Its Heroes” in *Soul on Ice* (1968), he draws a link between sixties black and white rebellions. For Cleaver, “In countless ways, the rebellion of the black students served as a catalyst for the brewing revolt of the whites” within the student and free speech movements (90). The influence on black culture of rebellion on white youth, Cleaver argues, characterizes the sixties counter-culture beginning with the 1957 popularization of the Beats and Mailer’s “White Negro” up to the anti-war movements of 1967-68. This generation of white youth, finally appalled of five hundred years of white colonialism is rejecting the white heroism that is “rooted in the myth of white supremacy and the manifest destiny of the white race” (90). Cleaver sees the crumbling of the edifice of white supremacy in the white consideration of black ways of life.

In Cleaver’s eyes, Baldwin and the white establishment are alike in that they both misunderstand how the primary impulse for white rebellion is the rejection of white supremacy. They both refuse to see that the Civil Rights Movement and African national liberation movements prompted the social disillusionment of white youth:

They speak of the ‘alienation of youth,’ the desire of the young to be independent, the problems of ‘the father image’ and ‘the mother image’ and their effect upon growing children who lack sound models upon which to pattern themselves. But they consider it bad form to connect the problem of the youth with the central event of our era—the national liberation movements abroad and the Negro revolution at home. The foundations of authority have been blasted to bits in America because the whole society has been indicted, tried, and convicted of injustice. To the youth, the elders are Ugly Americans; to the elders, the youth have gone mad. (93)

For Cleaver, American youth have not just decided to rebel against the conformist impulses of post-war prosperity; they have primarily rejected white supremacy. That is, the African liberationist, Civil Rights and Black Power movements have shaken the foundations for all authority and exposed the central power mechanisms of American
injustice as white supremacy. Citing the Denver passage of *On the Road* in which Sal Paradise wishes he were black or anything but a “white man disillusioned,” Cleaver notes that this passage is emblematic of the post-war rebels. Realizing that America is unacceptable to them in its present form, those like Paradise begin an “active search” for roles they could play in changing society. Cleaver, unlike Baldwin, sees little problem in their finding this model in black American life. For Cleaver, rather than a putting on of “borrowed heirlooms,” as Baldwin terms it, this appropriation of black lifestyles is an important chink in the “mountain of white supremacy” and signals a desperate attempt on the part of a new generation of white Americans “to enter into the cosmopolitan egalitarian spirit of the twentieth century” (123-24). Citing the Berkeley Free Speech movement, Cleaver writes:

The characteristics of the white rebels which most alarm their elders—the long hair, the new dances, their love of Negro music, their use of marijuana, their mystical attitude toward sex—are all tools of their rebellion....They have turned these tools against the totalitarian fabric of American society—and they mean to change it. (97-98)

This rebellion and outrage exists not only within the political strategies adopted by the domestic Civil Rights struggle and anti-colonial movements abroad, but more importantly for Cleaver, it exists in the realm of culture and styles of being. In adopting the so-called “Negro” styles of being, Cleaver finds white youth seeking “fundamental and irrevocable liberation” and are “succeeding in escaping” from the “big white lies that compose the monolithic myth of White Supremacy/Black inferiority” (123). Cleaver welcomes the white youth as symbols of the fight in which he is engaged—a fight for “fundamental and irrevocable liberation” from white supremacy. For Cleaver the student movement of the sixties should be read as the culmination of a long-
simmering battle between whiteness and blackness, and he applauds the whites who have finally crossed the battle lines toward blackness.

In “Notes on a Native Son,” Cleaver’s infamous homophobic attack on Baldwin centers on Baldwin’s supposed “ethnic self-hatred,” a “racial death-wish” that results from his deep need for love and acceptance from white men. His often incoherent and bizarre characterization of Baldwin’s sexuality as manifesting a racial death wish has often led critics to dismiss Cleaver’s argument in its entirety. However, lost in discussion of Cleaver’s attack on Baldwin is that the ostensible occasion for it is Baldwin’s critique of Mailer’s “White Negro.” Cleaver’s essay attacks Baldwin for critiquing Mailer’s point:

It is ironic, but fascinating for what it reveals about the ferment in the North American soul in our time, that Norman Mailer, the white boy, and James Baldwin, the black boy, encountered each other in the eye of a social storm, traveling in the opposite directions; the white boy, with knowledge of the white Negroes, was traveling toward a confrontation with the black, with Africa; the black boy, with a white mind, was on his way to Europe. (130)

If Cleaver endorses the trend toward blackness among white America in the sixties, he faults Baldwin for supposedly turning away from blackness. The irony is that Mailer is becoming more “black” while Baldwin seeks to become more “white.” Cleaver sees a massive shift in white culture away from white supremacy and towards new ways of life. And he views Baldwin’s critique as complicit with the white establishment that does not want “fundamental and irrevocable liberation” in the form of rebellious blackness.

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109 To be sure, Cleaver’s notions of sexuality and gender are highly problematic. Famously, the book contains a defense of the rape of white women as an “insurrectionary act” for which he ultimately apologizes in the book.
110 As Dievler points out, the mechanics and logics of Cleaver’s critique of Baldwin’s sexuality don’t quite make logical sense.
Baldwin of course is not a supporter of white supremacy, and Cleaver’s arguments for Baldwin’s “whiteness” are based on his incoherent association of homosexual with whiteness. In focusing on these arguments, Cleaver never really addresses Baldwin’s critique. In “The Black Boy Looks at the White Boy” Baldwin, rather than endorsing white supremacy, demonstrates shadows of white supremacy within Mailer’s essay and Kerouac’s novel. Baldwin sees in them a more hidden aspect of whiteness that attempts to fetishize black life as the opposition to white supremacy and post-war dullness. White supremacy is still in place because it has the power to define blackness to suit the white writers’ ideas of whiteness. Mailer and Kerouac do not really want the truth of black life which Baldwin has tried to tell: “I had tried, in the states, to convey something of what it felt like to be a Negro and no one had been able to listen: they wanted their romance” (272). The beat and the hipsters are in a white struggle for identity that cannot see beyond the white mythologies of black life. They are not genuinely interested in the complexities of black life which incorporate pain and loss in black life because to do so would be to question their own implications in this and responsibility towards it. Baldwin writes:

Now this is true for everyone, but in the case of the Negro, the truth is absolutely naked: if he deludes himself about it, he will die. This is not the way this truth presents itself to white men, who believe the world is theirs and who, albeit unconsciously, expect the world to help them in achievement of their identity. But the world does not do this— for anyone; the world is not interested in anyone’s identity. (279)

Mailer and Kerouac refuse to see the realities and complexities of black life because they can only see black life in relation to their own struggles for identity. What Cleaver views as an interest in black life, Baldwin reads as an interest in blackness as defined by
disillusioned whiteness. Sexualized blackness exists as a fantasy within the minds of whites, a means of ready-made liberation for white liberals.

For example, in *Tell Me*, the protagonist Leo takes a summer job as a model for a class of artists, whom he dismisses as merely “aging, idle women.” He is naked except for a jock strap that instead of providing modesty provides incitement and mystery about his sexual potency. During the sessions, he is often placed “somewhere in Africa” and made to carry a spear. He finds that when looking at the artists’ drawings he sees something entirely different from his own self image: “I found it disquieting that anyone could look at me and see what they saw; it was not less disquieting to realize that their bland, dumpling exteriors concealed so much of fantasy, helpless, lonely, and vindictive” (159). By the end of the session, the artists had their noble savage, “a harmless savage, suitable for a pet, and one who could certainly never have any children” (159). Baldwin finds in the primitive romance of black sexuality not just a stereotype, but a more pernicious domestication of blackness as a subordination to white fantasy. The metaphor of domestication reveals more about the women than Leo; domestication is a process of control and transformation. At the same time, the whites who get the thrill of a “harmless savage,” can deny their own complicity in structuring this fantasy. (Ironically Leo/Baldwin cannot see his own sexism here). That is, by distinguishing black sexuality from white sexuality, the artists do not have to address how their fantasies of black sexual potency are already a product of white culture. Leo only matters as a model for the women to project their fantasies onto; he is not a real social creature and he cannot talk back (as they cannot talk back to him). The thrill of the fantasy of sexual transgression
through blackness abstracts the artist from any consideration of the social context of their work.

So too, Mailer and Kerouac follow the naïve sexual liberationists in pinning their political hopes on the orgasm: “It seemed very clear to me that their glorification of the orgasm was but a way of avoiding all the terrors of life and love” (277). For Baldwin, they are not in fact embracing life and love in all its complexity, but merely basing their philosophy on an insistence on the fulfillment of an “infantile dream of love” which they believe they found in black life (277). Similarly to the artists so taken by the thrill of black hyper-sexuality, they ignore their own participation in the social construction of black sexuality, Mailer and Kerouac glorify the orgasm as opposed to the social complexities of love. Furthermore their refusal to engage with these social complexities of love allows them to de-race sexual desire. They believe that the orgasm is a pure space of opposition to the social world and refuse to see how desire itself is structured by the social world.

**Liberation Into the Glory and Suffering of the World**

In Baldwin’s mind the social and historical world is always wrapped up in our seemingly private desires. Sexual pleasure’s antisocial nature is a product of the American myth of purity and innocence. In this respect, Baldwin worries that the orgasm becomes like the little Swiss Village, a world of racial innocence and purity. Yet sexual revolutionary discourse prize orgasm’s antisocial character, its ability to estrange, distort or completely annihilate the social in sex. This belief in the ability of the orgasm to transcend racial difference has also been true for many critics of Baldwin’s work who
think that *Another Country* points to a “colorblind” world of utopian desire.¹¹¹

Challenging these critics, Robert Reid-Pharr points out that Baldwin compellingly argues that one cannot escape the raced social world during sex: "We do not escape race and racism when we fuck. On the contrary, this fantasy of escape is precisely that which marks the sexual act as deeply implicated in the ideological processes by which difference is constructed and maintained" (98). The fantasy of sexuality as a space distinct and free from the social world masks how much we are inextricably linked to the social world. For Reid-Pharr, the white heterosexual character of Vivaldo is the epitome of the naïve belief that the private realm is an oppositional realm which has the potential to transform the social world: “Vivaldo cannot connect, cannot come because he is so busy fooling himself that he exists outside his body, in a terrain in which love and desire conquer all” (98). And yet Vivaldo finds that love does not conquer all. To believe that it does Reid-Pharr calls the “tendency to insist upon the innocence of our sex, the transparency of desire at the moment of penetration” (88). While the naïve sexual revolutionaries and Mailer believe in the “transparency of desire” as an ethical value, Baldwin demonstrates how this transparency is a fantasy that masks how our desires, particularly in regards to race and power, are structured by the very social world we believe we are escaping. Baldwin’s novels force us to acknowledge how our sexual desires are neither autonomous nor authentic; rather, in the words of Henry Louis Gates, Baldwin shows us that “our private neuroses are shaped by quite public ones” (14). Gates continues, “The retreat to subjectivity, the ‘graver questions of the self,’ would lead not to an escape from the ‘racial drama,’ but–and this was the alarming prospect that Baldwin wanted to announce–a rediscovery of it” (14). That is, Baldwin presents an argument

¹¹¹ See particularly Lorelei Cederstrom and William Cohen.
similar to Marcuse’s repressive desublimation; to escape the raced social world through sexual pleasure ignores how this “liberation” is not only permitted, but it is also a performance of the very social structure we thought we have left behind.

In *Another Country*, Vivaldo, a writer who spends his evenings in Harlem and days in Greenwich Village, is easily read as the type of white hipster Mailer describes. In his affair with Rufus’ sister, Ida, a blues singer, Vivaldo firmly believes in the ethical transparency of desire. Though he is conscious of the difficulties of being an interracial couple in public, Vivaldo believes that “love can conquer all,” by which he means that their private intimacy creates a realm where race does not matter. Vivaldo maintains a guilt over Rufus’ suicide and believes his relationship with Ida will absolve him of this guilt. In a conversation Vivaldo asks Ida whether she will forgive him. Ida responds:

“I never said [Rufus] was a saint. But I’m black, too, and I know how white people treat black boys and girls. They think you’re something for them to wipe their prick on.”

[.....]

“After all this time we’ve been together,” he said, at last, “you still think that?”

“Our being together doesn’t change the world, Vivaldo.”

“It does,” he said, “for me.”

“That,” she said, “is because you’re white.” (324)

Vivaldo believes that as lovers he and Ida have created a colorblind private world that has changed the outside world. And yet Ida responds that the social world around them has not changed and it still bleeds into their relationship. Vivaldo, because he is white, does not truly know Ida in the same way he never truly knows Rufus. He sees both of them through a filter which distorts them toward his own white fantasies of blackness. To truly know Ida and Rufus would be to destroy his own innocence and reveal the myths of masculinity and whiteness that structure his desire. In Ida’s words, Vivaldo is not willing to “pay his dues,” because to do so is to shake the very fantasy that draws him to Ida.
Because Vivaldo cannot truly block off their private realm of love from the outside world, this desire seeps back into the bedroom. The sex with Ida is often imbued with hostility and described as “struggle.” During sex Vivaldo wants to explore the mystery of Ida in racialized terms: “he felt that he was traveling up a savage, jungle river, looking for the source which remained hidden just beyond the black, dangerous, dripping foliage” (177). At the same time, he is also determined to make her submit to him by controlling her pleasure:

He had never been so patient, so determined, or so cruel before. Last night she had watched him; this morning he watched her; he was determined to bring her over the edge and into his possession, even if at the moment she finally called his name, the heart within him burst. This, anyway, seemed more imminent than the spilling of his seed…And ruthlessly, viciously, he pushed her to the edge. (177)

For Vivaldo, sex is always a matter of possession. It does not consist of giving Ida pleasure, but rather of being solely responsible for her pleasure. And yet, Ida’s pleasure is really not Ida’s own; it can only exist as a fantasy in the mind of Vivaldo. Ida’s self-determined desires are completely opaque to him.112

Vivaldo’s desire is attached to understanding and owning the private truth of Ida. What Vivaldo does not realize is that Ida’s private life is something he cannot know, cannot possess, without dealing with the way her life connects with a larger social history. When he hears Ida singing blues, the song frustrates Vivaldo’s attempt to penetrate Ida’s inner world—a history linked with a larger history of the blues:

What in the world did these songs mean to her? For he knew that she often sang them in order to flaunt before him privacies which he could never hope to penetrate and to convey the accusations which he could never hope to decipher, much less deny. And yet, if he could enter this secret place, he would, by that act, be released forever from the power of her accusations. His presence in the strangest and grimmest of sanctuaries would prove his right to be there; in the

112 They are also often opaque for the reader. In the novel (and in much of Baldwin’s fiction) the desire of the female characters is rarely described with the same detail as male sexuality.
same way that the prince, having outwitted all the dangers and slaughtered the lion, is ushered into the presence of his bride, the princess. (313)

What frustrates Vivaldo is that Ida cannot be completely knowable to him; he cannot completely know her experience. Despite Vivaldo’s insistence that racial difference can be easily dispensed with in love, Ida cannot relinquish the history of her life. And conversely, Vivaldo cannot understand that love alone cannot give him this knowledge. Ida asks, “How can you love somebody you don’t know anything about? You don’t know where I’ve been. You don’t know what life is like for me” (325). Vivaldo tells her that he is willing to find out, but Ida points that it is not a matter of mere willing (325). Vivaldo does not actually want to know about Ida’s private life—to do so would necessitate coming to terms with the social forces that shape her private life and to end his own sense of innocence. Rather, Vivaldo insists that somewhere there is a purely private, race-less Ida who is completely separated from the social world. Vivaldo’s insistence on race-blind innocence during sex is both a self-delusion and a quest to render the social world irrelevant.

In striking contrast to the scenes of intimacy between Ida and Vivaldo, the final sexual scene of the novel between Eric and Vivaldo is described as completely sealed off from the outside world. Unlike Rufus and Leona’s relationship (and all of the other sexual relationships in the novel), no one knows about the sex besides Vivaldo and Eric. It is a completely private act between them. Before they have sex, when Vivaldo tries to make a comparison about having sex with different types of people, Eric tells him, “I’m not sure that there is a comparison, Vivaldo. Sex is too private” (337). Their lovemaking is supremely private, fully confined in Eric’s apartment. After the two have sex, “Then they lay together, close, hidden and protected by the sound of the rain. The rain came
down outside like a blessing, like a wall between them and the world” (386). The wall of rain and the early morning silence serves to place Eric and Vivaldo in an absolutely private moment, sealed off from the rest of society. There is even a timeless quality to their sex; it is as if Vivaldo has abstracted himself from history. Baldwin writes, “Vivaldo seemed to have fallen through a great hole in time, back to his innocence, he felt clear, washed, and empty, waiting to be filled” (386). The transparency of desire in the moment is able to emerge because the two are completely sealed off from the public; their lovemaking is utterly private.¹¹³

Furthermore, because their sex is so private, it is devoid of the violence that characterizes the sex of Rufus and Leona and Vivaldo and Ida. Unlike the warfare imagery of the sexual scenes of Rufus and Leona and Ida and Vivaldo, the sexual scene between Eric and Vivaldo uses warfare imagery in a different way. Baldwin writes, “Here Vivaldo sat, on Eric’s bed. Not a quarter of an inch divided them. His elbow nearly touched Vivaldo’s elbow, as he listened to the rise and fall of Vivaldo’s breath. They were like two soldiers, resting from battle, about to go into battle again” (344). The quarter of an inch that once separated Vivaldo from Rufus, and could never be bridged, is now separating him from Eric. Unlike the relationship between Rufus and Vivaldo, where the social constructions of race and masculinity prevent Vivaldo from reaching out to Rufus, as if they were soldiers in battle on two separate sides, here Vivaldo and Eric are soldiers on the same side. Vivaldo thinks, “This was as far removed as anything could be from the necessary war one underwent with women” (385). There is camaraderie between them; they are both in retreat from the dangerous outside world, resting until

¹¹³ And yet, despite the supposed private nature of their lovemaking, the image of Rufus comes crashing into Vivaldo’s mind. Baldwin warns here that sex never is truly “private.”
they have to go and do battle once again in the outside world (Eric with Cass and Richard, Vivaldo with Ida). The scene between Eric and Vivaldo exists in contrast to most of the other sexual scenes in the novel that are full of violent imagery precisely because it is the most private of all of the sexual encounters, being sealed off from the rest of society and history.\textsuperscript{114}

The extreme privacy afforded to Eric and Vivaldo in this moment highlights their investment in a fantasy of free and authentic sexuality. Yet, it is a result of their white and male privilege, their ability to abstract themselves from the rest of the tainted outside world. What does it mean that the most tender and the most successful love scene in the novel is the one where both of the participants are white males? What does it mean that this moment for Vivaldo erases all distinctions of identity: “And something in him was breaking: he was, briefly and horribly, in a region where there were no definitions of any kind, neither of color, nor of male and female” (302). It would be a mistake to read this scene like some critics who argue that it is a model for an oppositional ethics of equality, the uncovering of a universal authentic being before the social construction and definition of a social order.\textsuperscript{115} Vivaldo in the presumed realm of authentic private intimacy has “fallen through a great hole in time, back to his innocence” (386). For Baldwin this utopian sexual realm can only exist as a form of innocence, a willful denial of the realities of the social world.

While sexual desire allows and fosters this innocence because it can be abstracted from the social world, love brings one back to the social world. Love in this respect is a process of losing innocence. As Baldwin writes in the \textit{Fire Next Time}, “Love takes off

\textsuperscript{114} The scene also contains no women, which in Eric’s and Vivaldo’s mind complicates the social terrain. However, this scene is not unique in the novel for its absence of women.

\textsuperscript{115} See Cora Kaplan, Cohen, Cederstrom.
the masks that we fear we cannot live without and know we cannot live within” (341). It is this process that Vivaldo undergoes as his plot progresses. In the final encounter between Ida and Vivaldo, Vivaldo loses this innocence when Ida tells her story of her brother Rufus, her affair with record producer Ellis and her feelings on her relationship with Vivaldo. After the emotional conversation in which Vivaldo is forced to listen to Ida’s story in its entirety, the two embrace: “There was nothing erotic in it; they were like two weary children. And it was she who was comforting him. Her long fingers stroked his back, and he began, slowly with a horrible, strangling sound, to weep, for she was stroking his innocence out of him” (431). Note that the scene is pointedly non-erotic. In this respect, Baldwin finds that it is the lover’s negotiation of the social world that comprises love more so than feelings of affection or desire. Throughout the novel we can see that it is not Vivaldo’s orgasms that have lead him to this point. In fact, sexual pleasure for him is often described as terrifying, furtive and trivial; sex alone it is not revelatory for Vivaldo. Rather, it is through his circulation among lovers, primarily Eric and Ida, that Vivaldo loses his innocence. The orgasm alone cannot bring a richer awareness of one’s inextricability from the social world. However, the process of negotiation lovers must undergo between the orgasm and the outside world, their negotiation between private and public realms, has the potential to destroy the social myths of innocence. It is not desire itself, but the interpersonal networks created around desire that reveal how we are inextricably bonded to the social world and to each other. In *No Name in the Street*, Baldwin writes that love, by making one both stronger and more vulnerable gives one the ability to see the world anew. It is “a bondage which liberates you into something of the glory and suffering of the world” (366).
Like Lovers: Love as a Political Process

In the famous ending of *The Fire Next Time*, a consideration of the relationship between love and integration, Baldwin writes:

Everything now, we must assume, is in our hands; we have no right to assume otherwise. If we—and now I mean the relatively conscious whites and the relatively conscious blacks, who must, like lovers, insist on, or create the consciousness of the others—do not falter in our duty now, we may be able, handful that we are, to end the racial nightmare, and achieve our country, and change the history of the world. (346)

Given the stakes of his argument, it may seem flimsy that all that Baldwin offers as a political program is love. And yet, Baldwin has compelling reasons to do so. For Baldwin, as we have seen, love is less an affect or drive than a process. Within this process individuals of different and unequal backgrounds who have a sense of responsibility enter into a process of reciprocal negotiation with each other. If American society is defined by a fundamental disconnection between each other, a result of a legacy of hierarchical desire, Baldwin finds that Americans can never be re-connected, because they were at no time ever connected to each other. Baldwin finds in love a model for creating this connection. Love not only has the ability to rid us of our innocence, but it necessitates a vulnerability and engagement with others. The other creates our consciousness as we create theirs. And yet there is no plan or dogma for how this unfolds other than on the basis of an ethics of mutual understanding and reciprocal engagement. Together, lovers create a world negotiating between the past they have inherited and the future they desire.

For Baldwin, the metaphor of the reciprocal lovers is particularly useful for understanding integration. If the Civil Rights Movement reveals as much about white
cultural identity as it does about black cultural identity, then a reciprocal engagement between them is crucial: “In short, we, the black and the white, deeply need each other here if we are to really become a nation—if we are really, that is, to achieve our identity, our maturity, as men and women” (342). The type of reciprocity in Baldwin’s conception of love is needed politically because it allows both parties to participate in the creation of their mutual world from the world they have inherited. Baldwin’s model is radically democratic in arguing for the participation of all in creating the world together. Yet at the same time, Baldwin does not think that everyone needs to be “in love” or sexually intimate with each other; he wants us to act like lovers, not as lovers. Love is a model; unlike the orgasm of the sexual revolutionaries, it is not a dogma.

After the publication of The Fire Next Time in the New Yorker, Hannah Arendt sent a letter to Baldwin praising the essay, but strongly disagreeing with Baldwin on a major point:

What frightened me in your essay was the gospel of love which you begin to preach at the end. In politics, love is a stranger, and when it intrudes upon it nothing is being achieved except hypocrisy....Hatred and love belong together, and they are both destructive; you can afford them only in the private and, as a people, only so long as you are not free. (1)

Arendt’s criticism hinges on the place of love. Is love strictly a private matter, or can it transcend the private to be active in the public realm of politics? For Arendt, love should be strictly private and antithetical to politics. In The Human Condition Arendt describes the problems with love in public: “Love, by its very nature, is unworldly, and it is for this reason rather than its rarity that it is not only apolitical but antipolitical, perhaps the most powerful of all antipolitical human forces” (242). The problem with love for Arendt is two-fold: because it is a “passion” opposed to reason, it is “outside” of the political world, which for Arendt is a realm of reason. However, I think Arendt misreads
Baldwin’s understanding of love here, which is actually very similar to Baldwin’s understanding of a liberal political engagement through love.

In *The Human Condition* Arendt argues that Western democracies no longer have a distinction between private and public. It is only in the public realm that men can both maintain their particularity and achieve equality, having equal weight in negotiation toward the common good.\footnote{Arendt uses “men” exclusively. And the Greek polities of which she basis her theory only allowed a small section of men to engage in public affairs. Adrienne Rich in *On Lies, Secrets, and Silence* critiques Arendt for her apparent blind spot of the location of women in her work: “The withholding of women from participation in the *vita activa*, the ‘common world,’ and the connection of this with reproductivity, is something which she does not so much turn her eyes as stare straight through unseeing” (212). Yet, as Michael Warner points out, a feminist revision of Arendt’s conception of the public sphere holds potential for feminist and queer politics (58).} That is, it relates and separates at the same time:

For though the common world is the common meeting ground of all, those who are present have different locations in it, and the location of one can no more coincide with the location of another than the location of two objects. Being seen and being heard by others derives their significance from the fact that everybody sees and hears from a different position. (57)

Like lovers who meet in intimacy, each comes with a different particularity and different position in the social world. The public realm provides a space where we can be seen and heard and see and hear others, co-creating the common world. Arendt uses the metaphor of a table: “To live together in the world means essentially that a world of things is between those who have it in common, as a table is located between those who sit around it; the world, like every in-between, relates and separates men at the same time” (52).

Politically, from our particular positions we participate in negotiation over our common world; socially, we are related to each other through our participation in and responsibility toward what we hold in common. Arendt’s public realm provides what Michael Warner calls a mediated public, a public with a structural order as opposed to natural collections.
of people or an undifferentiated mass. Such publics are potentially world-making in their internal exchange through means such as print, genre, architecture, capital or in the case of sexual counterpublics, intimacy. For Warner, Arendt’s public is mediated through rhetoric which creates the occasion and structure for forming common worlds together (Warner 61-62). A mediated public like Baldwin’s public of love provides a way of negotiating with others while still maintaining individuality, but it also characterizes the world of others in a more structured way than mass society.

However for Arendt, the rise of mass society, what she calls the “social realm” in modernity has eclipsed the public realm; we no longer have any democratic engagement with each other over the common good. The social relies on a certain type of relationality: “the collective of families economically organized into the facsimile of one super-human family is what we call ‘society’” (29). The social realm obliterates the distinction between private and public. In its current form of mass society, there is no mechanism to relate and separate us. Our only realm of distinction is in “modern privacy” which is the Romantic “intimacy of the heart,” whose most relevant function is to shelter the intimate. Mass society does not allow true individuality because it “normalizes” its members, making them behave in similar ways. This makes the intimate the only realm of individuality, which in the social is reduced to the privacy of interiority. Thus in mass society we are given a choice between privacy or mass conformity; we can either understand our identity as part of mass society or as opposed to it. Politically, we can conform, retreat into the intimate realm, or rebel from the position of the intimate. For Arendt, as for Baldwin, none of these options really challenge mass society. To treat the private realm as a source of rebellion falls into the trap of venerating intimacy as a realm
“outside,” an abdication of changing the social. This is because love is unworldly; Arendt describes passion as inserting a “new world into the existing world,” and turning one’s back on the existing world (242). In this sense, she relays a similar fear as Baldwin’s worry that his friends vanishing into their orgone boxes is an abandonment of their responsibility to the world around them.

The “gospel of love” for which she critiques Baldwin is an ineffective politics because it collapses the private and public realm: “Love, by reason of its passion, destroys the in-betweeness which relates us and separates us from others” (242). Arendt is concerned here that love has the ability to erase difference and individuality and promote conformity. In this respect, love is like the social realm in that individual particularity is dissolved into sameness and one-ness. Though she does not explicitly say so, Arendt’s concern over love in mass society is likely due to its totalitarian associations. In ways similar to Thomas Pynchon, she is concerned that mass love can mask profoundly undemocratic regimes under the guise of communal bonding. However, despite her fears of love in mass society, Arendt makes an error in assuming that Baldwin’s insistence of love in the public realm is destructive. Part of her error is that Baldwin has a much more complex notion of love than Arendt presents. Her definition of love is capacious, encompassing both attachment and “unreasonable” passion; Baldwin separates the two. Additionally, Arendt sees love primarily as static affect of the couple, not as an ongoing process of social negotiation not limited to the couple as does Baldwin. Because of these two misreadings, she also overlooks how in *The Fire Next Time*, love is an interpersonal process of engagement within the social world that is similar to her own
model of the public realm. What is the work of the public realm if not for individuals to “insist on, or create, the consciousness of the other”?

As Cheryl Wall has argued, Baldwin’s sixties essays express a “strategic American exceptionalism,” that asks whether such a thing as a multiracial democracy is possible, finding that the presence of black people in America creates the unique historical opportunity to even ask this question (36). To extend this argument further, as we see in Another Country, Baldwin finds an exceptionalism in the emerging types of relational forms in the early 1960s. While localized to a small group in New York, the erotic public of the novel demonstrates both an American exceptionalism and a relational exceptionalism. The novel mirrors a decline of the family as the central relational frame for the characters and the rise of chosen and contingent forms of attachment. If we look at the erotic assemblage of the novel, there is no cultural definition for the circle of friends and lovers. What binds them together as a community? Though the group contains family members, it is not a family. As mostly artists, they do not work together or for each other. They also do not cohere by virtue of shared identity or even, as Eric and Yves’ travels demonstrate, by geography. They are only connected through Rufus’s suicide and by virtue of their love affairs and friendship with each other. Each deeply invested in their individual identities and particularities, they come together, circulating among each other in various groupings of friends and lovers. It is through this circulation that the bonds are established and an awareness among the characters of a group emerges.

117 In The Fire Next Time, Baldwin writes “America, of all the Western nations, has been best placed to prove the uselessness and the obsolescence of the concept of color. But it has not dared to accept this opportunity, or even conceive of it as an opportunity” (339-40)
118 See D’Emilio “Capitalism and Gay Identity” for a more in-depth discussion of the new relational possibilities in postwar America.
In this sense, this is a mediated public as Warner describes it. However, it is not mediated by rhetoric as it is in Arendt’s philosophy; love acts as a mediator and gives this public its structure. In Audre Lorde’s words, this erotic public is an expression of the capacity of Eros, to create a bridge across difference while still maintaining difference.\textsuperscript{119} The characters’ chosen bonds of affection constitute and create what becomes the common. And yet this common is not fully determined by the characters, for it is Rufus, not Arendt’s table that relates and separates them. Rufus remains a haunting presence in the novel, a reminder of past pains, shame and guilt.\textsuperscript{120} And yet it is only through negotiating with each other through sex and affection that the characters are able to move into the future.\textsuperscript{121} This type of process is what Baldwin imagines at the end of \textit{The Fire Next Time}–a group of particular individuals negotiating over their shared history out of which they make their shared future.

\textbf{The Welcome Table and the Happening}

Baldwin’s last completed work was the play \textit{The Welcome Table} (1987) which Baldwin began writing in 1967 in Istanbul. While the work has not been published, it was performed in 1990 at the University of the Arts in Philadelphia. The play, as described by critic Magdalena J. Zaborowska, is described as taking place out of the United States: “Its action takes place in a Provençal house much like Chez Baldwin in St. Paul-de-Vence and features international characters and a tangle of interracial erotic and sexual

\begin{footnotes}
\item[119] In “The Power of the Erotic” Lorde writes: “The sharing of joy, whether physical, emotional, psychic, or intellectual, forms a bridge between the sharers which can be the basis for understanding much of what is not shared between them, and lessens the threat of difference” (86). I will have a fuller discussion of this concept in the next chapter.
\item[120] See Kevin Ohi for a discussion of Rufus’ structural role in the novel as an absent center.
\item[121] It is also crucial to note that Ida and Cass, the two main female characters, do not have intimate contact with each other.
\end{footnotes}
For Zaborowska the play mirrors Gates’s description of Baldwin’s “Provençal court” from his essay “Welcome Table” written for *Time* in 1973. In St. Paul-de-Vence, the table served both as a place for Baldwin’s diverse transnational friends to gather and as a workplace for Baldwin’s writing. Zaborowska writes: “the space of writing was also the space where social gatherings took place, where the words typed on the page echo the conversations of friends, lovers, and hangers-on” (“From Istanbul” 202). Zaborowska’s description and interpretation of the play centers around its diverse group of characters, emphasizing the play’s fluidity of gender and sexuality. Yet the “welcome table” is also a metaphor for the type of erotic public Baldwin imagines and it functions in a similar way that Arendt’s public realm table does. The welcome table is a place where all are welcome to join together where they can be both related and separate.

We see this concept at work throughout *Tell Me How Long the Train’s Been Gone*. The novel, written in “New York, Istanbul, San Francisco, 1965-1967” is a sprawling narrative in which the actor Leo Proudhammer recollects his life as he recovers from a heart attack. The book received mostly negative reviews by critics for its supposed “protest novel” character and its embrace of black nationalist politics. Critics have mostly neglected Baldwin’s later fiction; one exception is critic Lynn Orilla Scott who sees the novel as expressive of Baldwin’s disappointment in liberalism after the Civil Rights movement. While I think this view is accurate, it misses the wide historical scope of the novel, which tracks the relational and political changes of postwar America. Like

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\(^{122}\) For a longer discussion of the play see Zaborowska’s essay “From Istanbul to St. Paul-de-Vence.”

\(^{123}\) See particularly Mario Puzo’s *New York Times* review of the novel.
Another Country, the cast of the novel revolves around a diverse collection of characters the protagonist Leo Proudhammer encounters through intimacy. Yet, unlike Another Country, the novel collects these characters in three crucial scenes of the novel where private individuals can come together and then leave once again. The novel’s detailed description of communal groupings, where individuals remain both related and distinct, unique in their own differences of sex and gender and personality, signify Baldwin’s interest in an erotic-influenced model of pluralistic democracy.

The first such grouping happens when Leo is a teenager at a summer theater workshop in the summer of 1945 in a small town in upstate New York living with his best friend Barbara (who is white) and Jerry (who is American-Italian, like Vivaldo) who are at the time involved in a relationship together. After work one day, they all meet another friend Madeline at a pizza joint in the small town, “the only place in town where Negroes and whites sometimes ate and drank together” (152). While they are in the pizza joint, two local black laborers, Matthew and Fowler, come in and sit down at a nearby table. Noticing their respective social positions, Leo begins to feel a disconnect between the two tables at the same time as he recognizes a sense of camaraderie: “We desperately wished to get to the root of the matter, but we did not know where to begin” (167). Leo sends drinks over to their table which prompts them joining Leo, Jerry, Barbara and Madeleine. The group drinks together until the restaurant closes, having several rounds, and exchanging addresses and numbers.

Leo is aware of the fleeting nature of the spontaneous grouping. This group may never be together like this again: “connections willed into existence can never become organic. Yet–we all liked each other well enough. We felt dimly lost and baffled as we
finally rose to take our leave” (180). Leo hopes that group can somehow stay together for the rest of the night, yet realizes that there are literally no places for them to go for another drink. To go to a white bar would be to leave behind Fowler and Matthew, and to go to the other side of town to the black bar would be to abandon his white friends. The group, at Matthew and Fowler’s suggestion ultimately decides to head to a bar on the black side of town. Fowler offers to drive them, and as they cross the invisible racial line of the city, Leo observes:

We drove through the sleeping town, mostly in silence now, our thoughts more than ever on flesh. Barbara’s head was on Jerry’s shoulder, Madeleine had her hand in mine, Fowler whistled as he drove, Matthew’s thigh was against my thigh. Perhaps for the first time, certainly not for the last, I had a sudden, frightening apprehension of the possibilities every human being contains, a sense of life as an arbitrary series of groupings and regroupings, like the figures—if one can call them figures—in a kaleidoscope. (196)

The thoughts of the brief silent moments in the car turn to the intimacy of flesh—Leo’s hand in his soon to be lover’s, Madeleine, and his thigh brushing up against Matthew. This group forms like a kaleidoscope of different private lives coming together as one, soon to be dismantled, and yet in that dismantling, pregnant with possibilities for a subsequent assemblage. However, Leo worries that despite this intense moment of togetherness, this assemblage cannot last. Nevertheless, Baldwin signals a shift in relational thinking from the static lasting bonds of family and identity group toward the proliferation of new social forms that emerge out of life’s contingencies. They are spontaneous and brief but built upon different modes of attachment across difference.

The group is both comforting and thrilling for Leo. He feels he is “in the middle of a turning wheel” with Matthew lightly touching the back of his neck, his hand in
Madeleine’s and Jerry’s head lowered next to Barbara’s. When they get to the bar, it is “loud and aggressive”:

> If it held the heat of love, it equally held the heat of fury, and it could not be described as friendly. Passion is not friendly. It is arrogant, superbly contemptuous of all that is not itself, and, as the very definition of passion implies the impulse to freedom, it has a mighty intimidating power. It contains a challenge. It contains an unspeakable hope. It contains a comment on all human beings, and the comment is not flattering. (188)

Passion here is double-edged containing both a challenge and hope, both an impulse to freedom and an intimidating power. For Leo, the night is a struggle between connection and disconnection, alternating between joy and terror. Such terror I would argue is the result of this public being dissolved in the crowd of the bar. While they were in the pizza joint and the car, it was possible for each member of the group to engage with each other. However, in the dancing and drinking crowd of the bar, there is a polarity between connection with the crowd and alienation from it. Between the feeling of the “heat of love” in connection with undifferentiated plurality and an individual feeling of disconnection, there is a lack of reciprocal engagement. Like Arendt, Baldwin then finds the “welcome table” or the erotic public as a space in-between undifferentiated plurality and singularity. The crowd contains potentials for communal hope, but cannot make good on it because it only relates; it does not separate. Baldwin suggests that it is within the bonds of love that local social structures can emerge out of the undifferentiated crowd.

The last pages of the novel revise the scene of a “welcome table” that we see in the pizza shop. After his heart-attack, Leo and his black militant boyfriend Christopher go to dinner at a Chinese restaurant in San Francisco with Barbara and her lover Pete. It is Leo’s first time back in public after his heart-attack and he feels himself being looked at by the other restaurant patrons:
Perhaps it was because I’d been away for so long, but everything tasted wonderful, and the room, the people, the rise and fall, the steady turning, as of a wheel, of many voices, the laughter, the clink of glass and silver, the shining hair, the shining dresses, the rings and earrings and necklaces and spangles and bangles and bracelets of the women, the tie clips and watches and rings of the men, all created an astounding illusion of safety and order and civilization. Evil did not seem to exit here, or sorrow, or intolerable pain, and here we were, a part of it. I was a celebrity, with a bank account, and a future, and I had it my power to make Christopher’s life secure...I’m going to feast at the welcome table, my mother used to sing–was this the table? (477).

The overwhelming list of observances, the symbols of social order and prosperity overwhelm Leo, giving him an “illusion of safety an order and civilization.” And yet this is only an illusion. Leo realizes that this table describes a social form of exclusion. This “welcome table” is now finally made welcome to Leo, but he has the nagging feeling about those others not at the table: “Beneath this table, deep in the bowels of earth, as far away as China, as close as the streets outside, an energy moved and gathered and it would, one day, overturn this table just as surely as the earth turned and the sun rose and set” (477). Scott reads this “energy” as black militancy, but it is much larger than that. Leo points not just to international anti-colonial movements, but to a rapidly accelerating process of social change. Within his lifetime (like Baldwin, Leo is born in the late 1920s), Leo has see massive changes in relational possibilities, with a diverse array of new social assemblages emerging from old ones. If the pizza joint represented the idea of a “welcome table” in 1945, Leo questions whether this concept is still viable. Not only is this table exclusive, but there are forces which will inevitably overturn it toward something else.

As they leave the restaurant, he imagines that San Francisco has been stricken with the plague, a plague that forces him to acknowledge his own mortality which was
“more certain than the storm that was rising to engulf us all” (478). Christopher explains to Leo this storm and this plague in terms of black nationalist rhetoric of the mid-to-late sixties about the failure of the end of legal segregation to fundamentally change America: “Nothing but lies. They never even meant to keep those treaties, baby, they wanted the land and they got it and now they mean to keep it, even if they have to put every black motherfucker in this country behind barbed wire, or shoot him down like a dog. It’s the truth I’m telling you” (479). Leo here does not quite endorse black nationalist theory (he leaves Christopher soon after). Rather he sees something compelling in Christopher’s passion and sense of justice that represents a historical force of change and a shift in power.

Christopher then takes Leo to an avant-garde performance (presumably a hippie “happening”) in a theater barn, with a crowd of mixed young people, hippies, black and white. The setting of the novel, begun and having taken place mostly in New York City, now transfers its attention to a sixties San Francisco milieu. When they enter, Leo feels he is witnessing and sharing a kind of rite that one would in church. The rite seems to Leo an attempt to call forth a primitive spirit: “The music drove and drove, into the past–into the future. It sounded like an attempt to make a great hole in the world, and bringing up what was buried” (481). He continues:

On the wall were four screens, and, on these screens, ectoplasmic figures and faces endlessly writhed, moving in and out of each other, in a tremendous sexual rhythm which made me think of nameless creatures blindly coupling in all the slime of the world, and at the bottom of the sea, and in the air we breathed, and in one’s body. (482)

The combination of the music and the video show, a type of performance so new and different from Leo’s type of middle-class theatre, seems to revolve around primal
instincts. As it resurrects the past in digging a violent hole and bringing up what has been buried, it finds in the sexual rhythm a life instinct in the most authentic and irreducible form, in the fundamental life process. The primitivist and chaotic nature of this performance stands in opposition to the “illusion” of civilization and order that Leo experiences at the Chinese restaurant. This scene recapitulates for Leo the atmosphere at the bar earlier in the novel. It is at once alienating and transformative; Leo expresses that he does not fully understand what is happening. And yet he feels that something is happening.

The happening presents a foil to the welcome table of the Chinese restaurant, the epitome of order and exclusion. The happening, all-inclusive and chaotic, aligns with the “energy” that gathers beneath the table and threatens its stability. And yet neither are satisfying social structures for Leo; the happening overly relates as the welcome table overly separates. But there is perhaps more opportunity in the energy of the happening. Though it is a chaotic flow of bodies and images, it is described as a force of life; this energy is as inevitable as the earth turning. In Scott’s reading, the conflict between the welcome table and the happening reveals Baldwin’s ambivalence between a failed liberalism and a homophobic and essentializing black nationalism. Yet, what Scott misses is that the ending of the novel signals an acceptance of the inevitable transformations of social dynamics and an ethical response to a changing world. The ending of the novel, by juxtaposing these two scenes, argues that order and chaos are polar choices that need to be negotiated through some mechanism.

Leo does not choose either scene over the other. It is between the inevitable energies of the happening and the inherited order of the civilized welcome table that new
social forms will emerge. How then will these social forms develop in politically progressive and ethical ways? What can mediate this social form into a public? Baldwin suggests that the only way a political entity can develop is by giving shape and form to this energetic, undifferentiated social mass. That is, in the words of Arendt, how can this new social mass be transformed into something that both relates and separates? The best hope for a new social form for Baldwin is love, a reciprocal process by which we insist on the consciousness of the other that creates another country out of the world we have inherited.
Chapter Four: From Within Outward: Patterns of Relationality in Bambara’s The Salt Eaters

“All, it’s through the fashioning of new relationships that we will obliterate the corrosive system of dominance, manipulation, exploitation”
- Toni Cade Bambara, “The Pill: Genocide or Liberation”

“The rules break like a thermometer, quicksilver spills across the charted systems, we’re out in a country that has no language no laws, we’re chasing the raven and the wren through gorges unexplored since dawn whatever we do together is pure invention the maps they gave us were out of date by years...we’re driving through the desert wondering if the water will hold out the hallucinations turn to simple villages the music on the radio comes clear—neither Rosenkavalier nor Götterdämmerung but a woman’s voice singing old songs with new words, with a quiet bass, a flute plucked and fingered by women outside the law.”


In number thirteen of Adrienne Rich’s Twenty-One Love Poems, desire destroys structure as flows of quicksilver disrupt charted systems. The poem gives us a glimpse of a post-liberation world in symbolic crises; old maps, forms, languages are no help here. New intimacies, like those between the two female lovers, require new forms and new languages. Liberation for the women presents a challenge to social order, but also an opportunity to articulate new relational and social forms. But how will these new forms emerge? Invention here is not pure, despite the lovers’ claims. Rather, in a country with no law, no languages—that is, no social forms that describe them—the women chase the raven and the wren into unexplored gorges looking for something new in ancient depths. They listen to new voices singing old songs with outlaws playing traditional instruments
creating new music and new libretti. Invention is not merely anti-social opposition as it is for male sexual revolution writers like Henry Miller or Norman Mailer, who find in Eros a groundswell of creative energy from some mystical place. Rather, Rich’s poem preserves continuity through the rupture of liberation. The lovers must rewrite the maps, form the hallucinations, and find new ways of playing old instruments if they hope to create new forms in this strange new world. Creativity for them is an act of invention and re-visioning—transformation, appropriation, twisting, and perversion.

Rich’s poem highlights the opportunities for rewriting social forms in the post-sixties world. The sexual revolution and sixties liberation movements destroyed old maps and old forms for many in America. By the late 1970s those like Rich were freed from “compulsory heterosexuality,” monogamy and the family. At the same time, Third World Liberation movements, radical feminist and gay movements looked beyond the traditional forms of attachment like race and nationality. Meanwhile, as Marxist critics like John D’Emilio and Fredric Jameson have argued, changes in modes of production created new opportunities for the creation of social forms as well as challenges for understanding social forms. Indeed, Jameson finds in the aftermath of sixties revolution and liberation movements, “the emergence of new subjects; that is to say, new people, other people, who were somehow not even there before, even though their bodies and their lives filled the cities and certainly did not materialize yesterday” (Postmodernism 357). While many revolutionary groups and writers saw tremendous opportunity in the proliferation of individual difference for creating new social forms,

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124 I do not mean to claim that radical sixties movements “succeeded” or “failed” in their goals in universal liberation. However, we should not overlook their impact on demographic and relational changes.
125 See D’Emilio’s “Capitalism and Gay Identity” and Jameson’s Postmodernism, Or the Logic of Late Capitalism, particularly “Demographies of the Postmodern” in the conclusion.
Jameson finds a troubling inability to “map” the social world. For Jameson, new proliferations of social difference mean “a social confusion” (54). Our old ways of understanding the social world no longer have any explanatory or political power. The maps they were given, as Rich would point out, were out of date.

What Jameson sees as a cognitive mapping problem, many feminist theorists and black women writers in the seventies and early eighties saw as an opportunity to develop new forms of social attachment. Yet given the dizzying multiplicity of possible social forms, how might we even imagine revolutionary political movements and revolutionary social forms? For black feminist theorists such as Audre Lorde and Hortense Spillers, Eros gives shape and form to difference; it provides a concept for them to map new relationships within a world of social confusion. Similar to prior erotic theories, black feminists shift Eros from a force of social rupture to one of social cohesion. Eros plays a central role in articulating new relationships outside those of domination, exploitation and oppression. However, even more so than even Baldwin’s de-sexualizing and relational expansion of Eros, these writers privilege Eros as merely one metaphor among many for understanding social attachments. The focus on Eros as relationality we see in prior mostly heterosexual male theories reveals the paucity of discourses to describe intersubjective, mutual and communal relationality, as it also reveals the gendered and raced aspects of dominant discourses of relationality. Rather than arguing how Eros could be freed from repression or become a model relational and social form, black feminist theorists argue that power operates in the articulation of relationality. While the liberation of a feminist Eros is an important aspect of their politics, they turn their question to the naming of this relational force. Who gets to participate in articulating relationality? How
does power operate through the articulation of relationality? By asking these questions, Eros reveals itself as a fruitful, but limited discourse; this limitation of Eros prompts these writers to move beyond it by inaugurating a search for new forms of relationality and social form.

This is particularly true in Toni Cade Bambara’s 1980 novel *The Salt Eaters* which develops its understanding of relational forms mainly through non-erotic metaphors. Similar to Rich’s poem, Bambara’s novel begins in a world of both absolute devastation and total renewal, perched between post-liberation failure and new political opportunity. In the novel’s description of a post-sixties social world in chaotic flux, Bambara’s novel hopes to reveal order in its proliferations of new relationships and social forms. For Bambara, there is an undeniable but formless force of attachment, similar to, but not limited to Eros, whose movements and circulations can reveal new patterns for articulating and understanding communal forms. Yet given the many types of connections between characters and the open-ended possibilities of relationality, how do we find and articulate these forms so that they may be useful? For Bambara, the artistic and political task is to give name and shape to this formless and nameless aspect of relationality in ways that are interdependent and democratic. Rather than impose a dogmatic order from above, however, Bambara seeks to find and develop patterns within the multiplicities of relationality and social forms in the novel. The metaphors and social frameworks that she finds in these forms emerge through their practices and are given shape through articulation endemic to the practices. It is neither an act of pure invention, nor pure pattern recognition, but a process of using existing frameworks to give shape to relationality that otherwise would remain formless and nameless. These patterns are not
limited to erotic ones; rather there are multiple frameworks for understanding social worlds that have been eclipsed by modern ways of seeing—including the liberation narrative. Bambara is interested not only in erotic communities but finds that multiple logics can give shape to alternative ways of being together and the co-articulations of shared social visions.

A Potential to Name

_The Salt Eaters_ contains many references to a transhistorical universal “force” of power and attachment. While this force is similar to the feminist Eros I develop in this chapter, it is not exclusively erotic—this force is experienced in multiple and often non-erotic ways by the characters. For some it is a healing force, for others a source of individual power, love, and even violence. In all cases though, characters and collectivities suffer from the lack of available articulations for this force. In _The Salt Eaters_, characters must use the available social discourses and modify and reshape them in a way that responds to one’s own participation in the social. However, one cannot rely entirely on a singular discourse of naming. In the novel the work of the healers and the artists is to use all available forms to give shape to the formless. For one of the two main spiritual healers of the novel, Minnie Ransom, this force is a spiritual healing force that circulates through individual vectors. As a healer, Minnie is practiced and sought out for her ability to shape, modify and direct this force, but it is her ability to articulate this continually elusive force that distinguishes her from others in the novel. As Minnie Ransom says of her healing force: “no one had yet, to her satisfaction captured it in a name” (47). In her recollection of discovering this force and naming it for herself, she
must use the available social discourses and frameworks in a novel way–twist and subvert them to understand this force:

Just like the corona of the high-tension cables in the old streetcar sheds near the Bible college where day after day, drawn to like a craving, she stared at, strained toward, till one misty night many years later and in another place altogether, a powerhouse in the north, she could finally see it. One misty winter night when Venus beamed down on the corrugated roof at home and Pleiades clustered in the New York sky like the illustration of the double helix taking up so much space in the magazines and papers, she could see it. The light pulsing, the light breaking up and bouncing, swimming together in a rainbow of color, fanning out, and then the pinpoint flame. (47-48)

Minnie moves from a consideration of this force of electricity as a flow, through the astrology in the form on constellation, in the scientific terms of DNA and its biological logic embedded in another logic of periodical circulation, all filtered through the mind of a Bible college student saturated in Biblical discourse. In short, Minnie must use all of these frameworks, because no other language exists and she cannot create one wholly her own. Each of these different discourses, all vastly different, get at something related to this force; they isolate some aspect of the ontological underpinnings of this force so that it can be articulated and made intelligible. The act of naming this force gives it some order, providing names to a formless feeling of power and connection. In the act of naming Minnie must make creative use of already existing discourses in order to produce a new discourse of “healing.” This process is ongoing; while she gets somewhat closer to naming this force in her healing session with Velma, she still has not settled on an articulation that really “gets” at whatever this force or feeling is. The problem then is not whether this force is free or frustrated, but how precisely it is articulated; our cultural and individual relation to this force is created in our articulations of it which are always given over to some aspect of relationality because we cannot entirely escape social discourse. It
is not whether this force is repressed or silenced but rather the ways that it is expressed and can be given form.

Similarly, black feminist theory in the late 1970s and early 1980s is keenly interested in articulating new and emerging models of relationality by reworking relational norms.\textsuperscript{126} Part of this interest, I would argue, is that key theorists Lorde and Spillers rely on theories of intersectionality addressing the interlocking “systems of oppressions,” as the \textit{Combahee River Collective Statement} puts it. Moving beyond the search for an origin of the fundamental binary of domination that characterizes radical feminism’s sex-class dialectic and sexual revolutionary’s Freudian-Marxist libido/society dualism, they begin their analysis from a different position than that of a singular, primal “fatal dialectic of civilization.” Yet at the same time, Spillers and Lorde do not fully embrace the open-ended potential of plays of difference and flow characteristic of French Feminist approaches to difference.\textsuperscript{127} As such, their analysis of the existing social worlds provides a more structuralist model of power and domination that is more complex than that of radical feminism yet more pragmatic than French Feminist theory. For example, Spillers’ model of “social grammar” as the logic of a discursive social symbolic position places the emphasis on one’s position within a social symbolic system. Thus Spillers’ conception of a social grammar allows much more complexity in thinking about relational lines of power and desire outside of the binary that does not devolve into formless difference. By focusing on a discursive symbolic field of multiple, interlocking

\textsuperscript{126} While Deborah McDowell has argued that “black feminist theory” presents a false unity, she also realizes that the term has “assumed a structural relevance and significance that can no longer be ignored” (559). I follow McDowell’s lead in using the term keeping in mind the various contestations and contradictions within the conceptual unity of the discourse.

\textsuperscript{127} For the relationship between radical feminism’s and French Feminism’s understanding of difference, see DeKoven’s chapter “Personal and Political” in \textit{Utopia Limited}. 

vectors of difference—race, gender, class, and sexuality—Lorde and Spillers chart out a
discursive field of differential social relationships.

Although Spillers’ and Lorde’s search for new relational models is not limited to the sexual or intimate, Eros provides an important metaphor to begin the search for new relational models. Critic Haunani-Kay Trask isolates what she calls the “feminist Eros” in contemporary writers such as Lorde, Rich, Cherrie Moraga, Jill Johnston, Mary Daly and Robin Morgan.128 For Trask, these writers embody Marcuse’s idea of libidinal rationality (Trask calls it “sensuous rationality”) in their alternative “relational capabilities” as women in a patriarchal society. As such, women’s experiential knowledge of life as “reciprocal, sharing, interdependence rather than a dominating possessive bondage” reveals that the discourse of feminist Eros provides both empowerment, but also a challenge to the relational norms of patriarchy (95). The feminist revision of Eros as both a source of power and a way to imagine alternative relationality provides a way to re-imagine forms of sociality. In Trask’s words, Eros provides a type of consciousness which enables “decisive mediation between the psychological and political spheres of life” (89). Eros provides a discourse through which to articulate power as well as re-imagine relationality.

Similarly, as Spillers notes, the “dramatic character” of sexuality as “human potential” also reveals its “discursive possibility” (173). However, for Spillers, this “American grammar” system of kinship has built its social power on the exclusion of black female autonomy over her sexuality. Emphasizing the lack of available relational or

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128 Ruth Ginzberg has called Lorde’s conception of Eros a specifically “lesbian Eros.” While most of the writers that Trask names were out lesbians, she does not want to limit her understanding of Eros to same-sex desire. While these writers were crucial for forming a distinct lesbian identity in the 1970s and 1980s, I do not want to limit the discussion of Eros here to sexual orientation.
social models that integrate black women as fully human, black feminists often describe black female sexuality in the motif of “silence” (or “absence” or “void”). As Evelynn Hammonds put it: “black feminist theorists almost universally described black women’s sexuality, when viewed from the vantage point of dominant discourse as absence” (486). Similarly, Barbara Smith in her foundational work on black feminist literary criticism refers to black women’s “invisibility” (132). Spillers examines the silence of experience of the erotic—what Lorde calls “a feared knowledge relegated to the bedroom alone” in terms of a void (“Uses” 57). For Spillers the cultural void of black women’s sexuality is endemic to the grammar of an American kinship system (and by extension American culture) which has denied black women as having anything resembling a “sexuality.”

Similar to Kate Millet’s Sexual Politics, Spillers locates sexuality at the center of oppression, but in Spillers’ mind, sexuality emerges within kinship order and its corresponding social order, not just between male and female: “At any rate, sexuality is the locus of the great drama, perhaps the foundational one” (163). In black women’s case, it is the absence of their position as agent within this social symbol that defines their “sexuality.”

Given her status in the “universe of signs” Spillers questions whether we can even talk about the “sexuality” of black women, when “sexuality” is a term of power belonging to the empowered. In order to possess a sexuality, we must be in relative control over it, something historically denied to black women in America. For the black female in the American social grammar system, “the prerogatives of sexuality are refused her

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129 While Smith, Hammonds and Lorde speak about black women’s sexuality as a determined object, I maintain that, like anyone’s “sexuality,” black women’s sexuality is primarily a discursive construction. As such, I am interested here in how it is discursively constructed and reconstructed as a model of relationality in Spillers’ and Lorde’s work.
because the concept of sexuality originates in, stays with, the dominant mode of culture and its elaborate strategies of thought and expression” (157). Prevented from participating in these forms of expression and articulated as existing outside the social structure of sexuality in America, we cannot say that the black female social subject has a “sexuality” in the same way other social subjects do. Denied her own self-definition (as well as claim to motherhood under slavery), the black female subject has historically been figured as partially outside of kinship systems figured as a bridge between the human and non-human world:

At this level of radical discontinuity in the ‘great chain of being’ black is vestibular to culture. In other words, the black person mirrored for society around her what a human being was not. Through this stage of the bestial, the act of copulating travels eons before culture incorporates it, before the concept of sexuality can reclaim and ‘humanize it.’ (155)

Historically denied the ability to name her own sexuality, black female sexuality has been placed outside the symbolic system and relegated to silence. If black women have been what human beings are not, then they are also what this language is not. However, this silence is not so much the absence of sound as it is the inability of this sound to be understood within a discursive system predicated on the exclusion of black women’s claim to speak. At this point, Spillers could valorize the unintelligibility of black sexuality as a force of transgression and liberation; yet this would only re-inscribe the symbolic system it seeks to escape. Spillers instead locates a larger opportunity here to rewrite the grammar/kinship system itself to include the black female subject.

Because of this lack of available language to discuss black female experience of sexuality, this limitation of language is also a limit for kinship systems that could be rewritten to include those excluded. However, this inclusion would not only bring in
those formerly excluded, but in doing so would necessitate the transformation of the logic of the grammar system itself. Spillers finds that the process of restoring black women a place in a kinship system is not a matter of unearthing black women’s authentic sexuality from remnants of the past; instead this situation presents a stunning opportunity to invent an entirely new grammar of American kinship: “Strip down through the layers of attenuated meanings, made an excess in time, over time, assigned by a particular historical order, and there await whatever marvels of my own invention” (203). Black women, through their exclusion, find themselves in the “incredible position” of being able to invent not only their sexual selves and their place in a kinship and social system but also the very reordering of this system itself. While Spillers’ focus on sexuality isolates the fissures within the American grammar system, it does not follow that these new marvels of invention must recapitulate an understanding of relationality limited to Eros.

Whereas Spillers focuses on the possibilities within symbolic exclusion, Lorde in a 1978 essay “The Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power” assigns Eros an affirmative and assertive character, “a source of power and information within our lives,” which has been repressed by Western systems of domination (53). The erotic is “an assertion of the lifeforce of women, of that creative energy empowered, the knowledge and use of which we are now reclaiming in our own language, our history, our dancing, our loving, our work, our lives” (58). Because desire and power have been repressed but the affective and sexual experience of this powerful erotic drive remains, Eros creates a source of contradiction and possibility. This power, formerly described under white patriarchy as absence, must be made visible and intelligible through a process of social articulation.
Lorde’s expansion of Eros outside of mere sex means that Eros provides a language for developing new forms of relationality. For Lorde, the erotic is not so much a source of power from within the self as it is an impersonal force which travels through the self. For the individual, the erotic is a source of “power and information within our lives,” the “yes” within our selves up against the social. In this respect, it is similar to the “lifeforce” that emerges from the Freudian Left conception of Eros. Similar to the Freudian conception of Eros’s outward motion of desire, it is also a force of attachment that allows us to “live from within outward,” allowing us to engage responsibly in the social world around us (58). Primarily though, the function of the erotic is a force of non-threatening attachment to the different other: “The sharing of joy, whether physical, emotional psychic, or intellectual, forms a bridge between the sharers which can be the basis for understanding much of what is not shared between them, and lessens the threat of difference” (86). In Lorde’s mind Eros both relates and separates us; it is a moment of identity amidst difference that does not completely erase difference into identity. Eros allows difference to have a creative function; it is a way of negotiating with difference outside of the traditional means. Presently for Lorde, we have few ways of relating across difference:

Institutionalized rejection of difference is an absolute necessity in a profit economy which needs outsiders as surplus people. As members of such an economy, we have all been programmed to respond to the human differences between us with fear and loathing and to handle the difference in one of three ways: ignore it, and if that’s not possibly, copy it if we think it is dominant, or destroy it if we think it is subordinate. But we have no patterns for relating across our human differences as equals. (“Age” 115)

Eros provides Lorde a way to relate across differences as equals, outside of a hierarchical system of privilege or domination. In Lorde’s conception of the erotic there is a mutual
recognition of the commonality between individuals, a place where difference is both maintained and its threat resolved. If, as Lorde notes, oppression results from our failure to realize inevitable difference as a “dynamic human force,” then the erotic serves as a bridge across difference with a goal of attachment. The “creative function of difference,” has as its necessary counterpart a bonding of what we share, even as it maintains difference. Such possibilities arise once we expand the definition of difference (at least theoretically) beyond class-based differences of race, gender, and sexuality to see all individuals comprised of many styles of differences. Differences proliferate easily in this conception, and yet for Lorde, Eros serves as force which can bridge difference and create many new possible points of connection between people in ways that can transform the self understanding of a social world. Furthermore, not only does it have the potential for new interpersonal attachments, but it also serves as a bridge between the political and spiritual, riven apart because of “incomplete attention to our erotic knowledge” (56). In this sense, Eros once again takes on a spiritual character as a universal form of connection from the individual to the cosmic—it is undeniably felt, but in order to have social relevance must be articulated.

As a poet, Lorde privileges poetry as a form which gives “names to those things that are nameless and formless” (36). Critic Roderick Ferguson has argued that Lorde’s understanding of the erotic is linked to writing and giving voice to the nameless and formless aspects of experience at the intersection of the personal and social world, “a way of conceiving the erotic as a resource and framework for social agency in general” (297). Sexuality is “rehabilitated” as “material for social practice and as fuel for intellectual production” (298). Eros does not name the feeling of this undeniable force, but it is a
specific articulation of it that has social currency. To name Eros is not to claim the ontology of Eros but to claim the right to name the nameless and formless. Similarly, Spillers argues that feminists should claim the “monstrosity” of a “female with a potential to ‘name’” to make a place for this excluded social subject (Spillers 229). In short, both Lorde and Spillers see the predicament and opportunity of black women’s sexuality as a problem of naming, a problem of contested epistemology rather than a problem of repression. Such naming does not need to reproduce the prevailing social ideologies but can rewrite those social possibilities in multiple (but not infinite) ways. In placing the emphasis on articulation as a creative act, both claim that articulations of sexuality are the place where political power is exercised most dramatically.

Outside the logic of the American grammar system is the possibility for the creation and emergence of new forms of kinship outside the logic of domination. In the *Combahee River Collective Statement* (1977) this idea is further articulated as an opportunity to develop a universalist claim on behalf of *all difference* at the same time it binds itself to the necessity of an identity politic: “We might use our position at the bottom, however, to make a clear leap into revolutionary action. If Black Women were free, it would mean that everyone else would have to be free, since our freedom would necessitate the destruction of all the systems of oppression” (Schneir 183). The minoritarian project of self-definition exists alongside the universalist goal of ending all systems of oppression based on identity. As Hammonds argues, the politics of black female sexuality (here also queer) is not merely about filling the silence to shore up an “invisible” sexual identity. Rather Hammonds argues for “a politics of articulation,” in which black queer female sexuality “represents discursive and material terrains where
there exists possibility for the active production of speech, desire, and agency” (494).

Similar to Spillers, Eros begins to be evacuated of its exclusively sexual context as it becomes a discourse through which to enact a “politics of articulation” that asks who gets to articulate relationality within the social world.

For Lorde and Spillers, this opens up a consideration of possibilities for new social forms and identities. Lorde begins her essay with the statement that “there are many kinds of powers, used and unused, acknowledged or otherwise” of which Eros is only one (53). As Spillers writes: “As I see it, the goal is not an articulation of sexuality so much as it is a global restoration of power. In such an act of restoration, sexuality becomes one of several active predicates. So much depends on it” (175). Spillers closely links the search for black female sexuality as a project that can realign power through the social world in a more equitable way through an articulation of Eros as well as several other active predicates. Such models may arise out of black women’s historical memory. To this end Spillers argues that “feminist investigators” should both in the present and the past “imagine women living in their pluralistic configurations” (173). Finding such models of kinship which have persisted despite being ignored or repressed, can allow feminists to “introduce a new semantic fold” a new grammar that makes the black female social subject the point for some “insurgent ground” (229).

Yet with a rapidly proliferating set of subjects and arrangements, how do we decide which ones are viable for our social life together? How do we begin to narrow down the universe of possible social forms? As several critics such as Deborah McDowell and Cheryl Wall have argued, for many black women writers of the 1970s a guiding force comes through black women’s experience in the present but more crucially
in a deep and reconstructed sense of the past. This is best symbolized by Alice Walker’s “search for our mothers’ gardens” or Toni Morrison’s vision of imaginative archeology in which the forming of narratives of the past is as much an act of imagination as it is an act of discovery. As Spillers puts it: “Just so, the elders pass on their voice, their tongue, their language” they pass on their notions of sexuality and kinship which demand attention (153). Similarly, Marcuse argues not for a return to a prior “stage” of civilization, but a progression to an imaginary temps purdu (Essay 90). In *One Dimensional Man* he writes: “The way in which a society organizes the life of its members involves an initial choice between historical alternatives which are determined by the inherited level of material and intellectual culture” (xlviii). Marcuse and black feminist theorists do not embrace a romantic return to the past, but rather find in memory and history an understanding of the contingencies of present social forms and the multiple ways they can be dismantled and reconstituted differently.  

It is within the shifting, playing with and re-naming of constraint that new social forms emerge. In late twentieth-century black women’s writing, critic Wall calls this technique “worrying the lines” (borrowing from the blues trope) that describes moments where genealogical quests are thwarted and texts subvert the conventions of literary tradition so that a connection to the past can be re-visioned (9). Thus, we should not and perhaps cannot get rid of our reliance on the past and present ways of thinking in articulating the future. This is the problem with antisocial liberation narratives that seek to completely abolish the status quo. They not only miss out on a cache of historical

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130 While there are theoretical links between Marcuse and feminist movements, it is worth noting that Angela Davis was a student of Marcuse, who influenced her work, particularly in *Women, Race, and Class*. For an account of Marcuse’s influence on Davis, see Cynthia A. Young’s *Soul Power*. 
alternatives for social forms, but also are willfully oblivious to the extent by which historical and social forms structure the liberation narratives and the choices of historical alternatives. Rather it is through twisting, reshaping, worrying the line and re-naming, acts requiring both the discovery and invention of existing and past social forms, that new forms emerge. And yet, to dive into the void, to follow the raven into the gorges unexplored since dawn, is to easily wind up in the abyss of solipsism or lost in the dizzying blur of difference. How might we re-emerge from this gorge, out of the wreck, with something to say? What patterns of attachment will we resurrect and revise? If we are Spillers’ feminist investigators, how do we go about finding new relational model?

**Patterning A Free Society of Whole Individuals**

Though it ostensibly tells the story of activist Velma Henry in the fictional town of Claybourne, Georgia, Bambara’s *The Salt Eaters* narrates the story of a complex social assemblage. By de-centering its protagonist, *The Salt Eaters* makes clear that not only is a connection between the personal and political difficult to achieve but that Velma’s personal world is no more privileged than any other character’s. The novel, like *Gravity’s Rainbow* and *Another Country*, along with novels from Walker (*Meridian, The Color Purple*), Morrison (*Sula, Song of Solomon, Paradise*) shift between multiple viewpoints and refuse to give moral or epistemological authority to any one character. Part of the difficulty of mapping social forms in Bambara’s novel is that no character’s

131 While this is true of many modernist and postmodern American novels, critic Madhu Dubey has argued that this is particularly true of black women novelists of the 1970s and 1980s such as Alice Walker, Gayl Jones, Toni Morrison and Bambara. Each are interested in charting out “communal intersubjectivity,” which “affirms a psychological wholeness that is communally oriented and is explicitly opposed to the self-sufficient individuality of bourgeois humanist ideology” (4). This communal intersubjectivity, of which erotic communities are a predominant example, also opposed Black Aesthetic models of community with their ideological rigidity.
epistemological frame is privileged and all are equally capable of understanding the social world differently. This is fairly typical of modernist and postmodern novels, but instead of seeing this epistemological plurality a retreat into the personal realm as do critics such as Jameson, Bambara understands plurality as an opportunity here to create new maps, new relational and social forms. She does not retreat into solipsism of the individual or argue for a new understanding of totality. Indeed, Bambara searches for a “framework” to move between plurality and totality without resorting to dogmatic epistemological frames. In a 1983 interview with Claudia Tate, Bambara says, “The trick, I suspect, at this point in time in human history as we approach a period of absolute devastation and total renewal, is to maintain a loose grip, a flexible grasp on those assumptions we hold to be true, valid, real. They may not be” (Lewis 58). Bambara demonstrates how a world of de-centering and difference provides the opportunity to create new patterns of relation from different vantage points. She does not want to relinquish the grasp, nor grasp tighter as Jameson does, but to maintain a flexibility of form. For Bambara, the revolutionary social world is a “free society of whole individuals” by which she means a relationship which balances individual autonomy with interdependence; one cannot be “whole” without being interdependent with others (“On the Issue” 129). That is, Bambara searches for a harmonious relationship between the individual and community in which the personal and political mutually reinforce each other. Such a loose grip allows a plurality of frameworks for thinking about the social world to coexist, overlap and interact within the novel.

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132 In “Pleasure: A Political Issue” and “On the Sexual Production of Western Subjectivity” Jameson argues that the political uses of sex become merely an act of the constitution of the individual self as an “ideological solution” (554).
Yet, there is a limit to the extent to which Bambara valorizes difference. Some type of form is needed to understand the patterns that emerge between individuals within a complex social field of difference and atomization. Rather than issue a top-down ideology onto a diverse social world (as does Marcuse, for example), Bambara looks for patterns that emerge from encounters of difference; she is interested in the novel in emergent forms. Difference in this respect is not a problem for political solidarity as it is for Jameson, but is an opportunity for new forms of relationality necessary for true revolutionary change. As Lorde writes:

> Difference must be not merely tolerated, but seen as a fund of necessary polarities between which our creativity can spark like a dialectic. Only then does the necessity for interdependency become unthreatening. Only within that interdependency of different strengths, acknowledged and equal, can the power to seek new ways of being in the world generate, as well as the courage and sustenance to act where there are no charters. (“Master’s” 111)

Similar to Lorde’s understanding that the “masters tools will never dismantle the master’s house,” for Bambara the search for new relational patterns is necessary for articulating new critical and political tools. In the meeting of differences, new ways of being in the world emerge out of existing forms. For Lorde, Eros provides a fundamental building block, a way of understanding how differences can meet and create affective bonds and new social forms. However Eros is not the only way to understand the social world and for Bambara it is a limited one, prompting her to develop multiple articulations of a “force” or “energy” of connection. Nevertheless, as it does for Spillers and Lorde, a feminist Eros provides a crucial form of understanding the social world. Similar to prior conceptions of Eros, the force that Bambara articulates in the novel is not an antisocial force but one of undeniable connection. And like Lorde’s Eros, it is a force of attachment
that is not merely sexual. It creates a bridge across multiple axes of difference. If in Lorde’s conception, Eros creates bridges between difference in multiple ways, it does not do so in infinite ways; it is limited by already existing symbolic systems and social grammars. Bambara is interested in what other understandings of force, outside of Eros, may rework these symbolic systems and relational norms.

This “force” of attachment in the novel is a constant, singular essence, but one that eludes rational understanding; it can be named in multiple ways but never fully and singularly determined. While this force may be sexual, it is not exclusively so and to name it as “sexual” is to limit and circumscribe it. Bambara’s novel is curiously absent of much sexual pleasure (yet filled with other types of sensual and spiritual pleasures between people). We could speculate that part of Bambara’s hesitation to grant much rhetorical power to sexual pleasure is its rather shameless historical legacy of manipulation. In “On the Issue of Roles” Bambara finds that sex difference in roles is an obstacle for political consciousness, even suggesting a bracketing of sex until it can be conceived outside systems of domination. Yet at the same time, in her remarks about gay liberation, Bambara notes the possibility of Eros to create new frameworks: “...they bring to the whole question of how many frameworks and how many perspectives do we need in order to understand how this stuff is put together in order to dismantle it” (Lewis 79). Yet, Bambara argues that gay and feminist analysis are only one “prong” in the “sex-gender-caste pathologies”; sexuality alone is not a suitable framework for social renewal (Lewis 80).133

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133 Bambara’s comments are in response to a question posed by Justine Tally about Hull’s criticism of Bambara’s omission of sexuality in The Salt Eaters in her aforementioned essay on the novel. In the interview Bambara acknowledges her omission.
In the novel, there are only a few extended descriptions of sexual pleasure. In a conversation between Minnie and Sophie they lament that the youth of today “don’t know how to draw up the powers from the deep like before” (44). In the lack of cultural avenues for the articulation of this “deep” power, this power becomes merely one of sexual pleasure. They talk of one woman Sophie and Minnie healed recently: “A dormant nerve in the clitoris. No wonder she restless and jumpy with back pains and her legs aching. And no wonder, no mating fuel there at all” (44). While the lack of sexual drive signals a problem with this patient’s energy flow throughout her body, sexual pleasure is a symbol of a larger problem of confusion: “But like I say, she got options. Just like the Liza in the song. She can go ahead and fix the fool bucket herself and quit getting so antsy about it. Or she can go find a man that can. Always got options” (44). The patient’s problem is not that she is lacking the force; it is that she does not know how to draw on it because she does not have a frame of reference for articulating it.

At the same as Sophie and Minnie want to get their patient in touch with this drive, the novel also warns against believing in the ethical transparency or sanctity of this drive. As Sophie notes in Doc Serge, the head of the Infirmary:

How simple life was for people like Serge who maintained that all knowledge, all problem-solving techniques resided in the groin, the loins, the pelvis. She smiled. But she longed for contact with her drifting soul, longed for illumination, for conscious contact. (152)

Doc Serge, echoing a naïve sexual liberationist view like that of Miller or Mailer, conceives of the sanctity and certainty of the orgasm as the ultimate in ethical and political acts. Yet, Sophie presents a different conception of the soul as free, “drifting” and finding illumination in contact with herself through conscious contact with others that moves beyond the pelvis.
Bambara, along with Lorde, rewrites Eros as a force of attachment through the individual and binding individuals to themselves through the other (this is the meaning of wholeness), rather than a force of social rupture. In both of their conceptions of the erotic, the source of energy works through the individual; the individual is not the source of the energy, she does not “own” it, or necessarily even “control” it, but may as Minnie Ransom and Sophie Haywood do, channel it. This force is always expanded beyond the autonomous individual. In the twentieth century, sexuality has been limited to individual autonomy and as a metaphor for political freedom takes on an antisocial character (as it does for Doc Serge). However, for Bambara and Lorde, in the re-articulation of sexuality, there is a powerful possibility to rename this energy as a metaphor of attachment and circulation. This articulation of energy as a circulating and fluid power allows for non-hierarchical connection. It is a social force which acts through the individual, a constant of flow of identity circulating through difference. When available to it in the outside world, it flows through her and emanates outward, often in the form of concentric circles in the novel, “from within, outward” as Lorde describes it (“Uses” 58).

And yet the autonomous individual, a “whole” individual is an important part of this conceptual mapping of cosmological energy. As Bambara notes, “A revolutionary must be capable, of above all, total self-autonomy” (“On the Issue” 124). In Bambara’s political imaginary, it is only individual autonomous people, not a class, than can make “revolution irresistible.” Similar to Lorde’s ideas of difference, Bambara imagines a world where non-exploitative affinities and connections develop along many different vectors of difference. Adherence to a political program, however “revolutionary,” that denies individual autonomy and exploits the individual is not liberation. Fruitful
connections and viable social organization can only come about when conscious
attachment across difference is possible between autonomous individuals. By articulating
and naming these flows of energy, we give shape and definition to social forms. This task
is one of invention, not pure, *ex nihilo* creation; it is an act negotiating through existing
social forms and reworking them, not completely breaking from them. Bambara argues
that there are already relational forms around us that can give shape to the mysterious
force and reveal patterns for living together, conceiving of a “we” in strikingly diverse
ways. The act of naming social forms based on the proliferation of patterns already of our
social and historical world is a political act, a revolutionary act of rewriting the social
world to determine the multiple ways a “free society of whole individuals” can thrive.

However, individuals cannot articulate alone; for Bambara the articulation of this
force must be a communal event. Though it charts a complex social world, the novel
takes place only over a few hours as Velma, after trying to kill herself, undergoes a
spiritual healing to make her “whole” so that she might “get back in circulation” to join
the liberation movements of the moment. The novel’s treatment of the sixties and
Velma’s story is both a look backward (What went wrong?) and a look forward (What do
we do with what we’ve inherited?). Velma has attempted to kill her self out of a sense of
frustration and despair over the slow progress of political change according to the
political activists. As Velma’s no-nonsense, rational political friend Ruby tells it:
“Sometimes she takes everything so...seriously, gets disappointed, even when she knows
better” (216). In conversation with Ruby, the more spiritually-inclined friend Jan, isolates
an alternative cause of Velma’s suicide as a “drive for invulnerability” which has
ironically left Velma “completely vulnerable” (216). The diagnosis of Velma from these
two seemingly irreconcilable positions in the novel—the political and the spiritual—is a metonymical representation of the problem of liberation in the text. As one of the Seven Sisters notes, “the material with the spiritual does not a dialectic make” (64). The novel diagnoses Velma’s exhaustion and despair as symbolic of the larger political task—the necessity of integrating the spiritual with the political into some type of pragmatic social form.134

Jan’s diagnosis corresponds to the diagnosis from the healers Sophie Haywood and Minnie Ransom—Velma cannot be “whole” primarily because she seeks to be “sealed and inviolate.” According to Minnie Ransom, Velma wants to “withdraw herself and prop up a border guard to negotiate with would-be intruders” (5). This feeling of being blocked off is mirrored in the contrast between Velma’s and Minnie Ransom’s body language during the healing. Velma’s gown is “tight” across her back: “So taut for so long, she could not swivel. Neck, back, hip joints dry, stiff. Face frozen. She could not glower, suck her teeth, roller her eyes...” (3). Meanwhile, Minnie Ransom, moving around Velma, is “making a big to-do” of draping her silky shawl while “humming lazily up and down the scales” in a “bright red flouncy dress” (3). The static nature of Velma’s body is juxtaposed to the dynamic nature of Minnie Ransom, emphasizing Velma’s invulnerability against Minnie Ransom’s freedom to move in the world around her as she maintains an openness, a vulnerability to the energies outside of her immediate body. In the novel, paradoxically, Minnie Ransom is the one who is “whole,” engaging in a back and forth with the world around her which allows the healing power to flow through her.

134 For Bambara, revolution is not an event, but a process. As Derek Alwes argues, “Bambara’s sense of the possibility of political revolution is not represented by the naïve belief in one single, radical revolutionary transformation after which everything is changed forever; it is a recognition that change occurs over time in the hearts and minds of individuals who create, participate in, and identify with a strong, unified community” (2).
By being open to the energies of the elements of the world around her, she can be a vector to channel these energies to Velma.

However, Velma’s invulnerability does not allow these energies to penetrate; she is closed off from others and the outside world. Her individuation paradoxically is the opposite of wholeness because Velma abstracts herself to a realm distinct from the realm of others. As she imagines looking at a glass jars, she thinks: “To be that sealed, sound, taste, air, nothing seeping in. To be that available at last, sealed in and the noise of the world, the garbage, locked out” (19). Bambara emphasizes the “vacuum” of silence in this scene that Velma attempts to create around her, silencing the outside world and closing herself off from it. For Bambara, to be “whole” means to be integrated into “the community that names you”; to be whole is to acknowledge and be open to a reciprocal relationship with others (Deep Sightings 215). In his exploration of the use of sound in the novel, Carter Mathes views silence slightly differently. Velma’s self-imposed silence is “a revolutionary act of freezing time, perhaps the most direct, literal engagement with history one might imagine” (374). Such a silence, a kind of retreat, allows Velma to search for the “embryonic language” of radical change with the help of Minnie Ransom’s healing. I would argue the opposite—the search for embryonic language cannot happen without an engagement with otherness, because language creation for Bambara is always a social act. Velma’s problem, her “lack of wholeness” is her inability to articulate her

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135 The glass jar of invulnerability and separation from the outside world is resonant of Sylvia Plath’s metaphor of the bell jar. Here the crucial difference is that while in Plath’s novel the bell jar is placed over Esther, here Velma places herself in the glass enclosure as a means of escape, not imprisonment.

136 It should be also noted that Velma has used an orgone-box which she uses with her lover Jamahl. Like in Baldwin’s essays, the orgone-box is a symbol of disconnection, not connection as was Reich’s intent.

137 Alwes argues that Bambara’s model of identity is linked to relationality: “identity is not a self construction arising out of a virtually open-ended series of options; it is already available through membership in one’s community” (2).
relationship to the things around her and so she has pushed them out as merely “noise.”

While Mathes’ reading focuses on Bambara’s search for a new language within the capacious space of silence, without an aspect of social engagement, there is no language. New forms of naming cannot come out of nothingness or silence; they must come about in the interplay of silence and noise from the outside world. Silence opens up an oppositional space of self-reflection, but it alone cannot create a new language to describe experience.

Within *The Salt Eaters* and as expressed in her many essays and interviews, Bambara develops a concept of self- hood that is permeable and relational to that which is outside of it; wholeness for an individual can only take place within the social world. As she notes in her preface to the anthology *The Black Woman* (1970), the drive for invulnerability is a problem to be overcome: “What characterizes the current moment of the 60s is a turning away from the larger society and a turning toward each other” (1).

Our energies which appear to emanate from our individual beings are “derived from a determination to touch and to unify” (1). Individual retreat from the social world is a radical act, but one with little political potential, let alone a solid mental health or artistic strategy. In this respect, to retreat into silence is to become less whole and less able to speak; it is only within our interactions with others that we can create an embryonic language of social change out of existing frameworks.

The task then is to rewrite the grammar of kinship in the social world, to give shape to a silence that is not an absence, but an incoherence. Minnie Ransom’s task as a healer is to break the wall between Velma and others so that energy can circulate through and from her body. As Akasha Gloria Hull in her foundational critical reading of the
novel points out, Velma stands at a nodal point of a network which “radiates outward” (125). Hull writes, “From the center, the threads web out, holding a place and seeing links between everything and everybody” (125). Velma is the “nexus” of the novel, but Hull is careful to avoid any sense that Velma is the “center”; she is merely the nexus of our particular attention, a way into the relational web which structures the novel, no more or less important than any other nexus/individual. Indeed a central complaint about Velma from other characters in the novel is that she takes up too much attention, she drains energy away from them by being “self-centered” to the point where Jan and Ruby contemplate giving up on her. The lack of reciprocity and balance between Velma and the network in which she is enmeshed is directly tied to her inability to be “whole” which we are told in the novel means “finding meaning where you’re put” (7). Velma cannot find meaning without recognizing where she is and how she fits into the world around her. Hull provides an extensive visual mapping of concentric circles around characters webbed with each other in (mostly) non-heirarchical ways. Hull’s mapping is a further articulation of Bamabra’s literary form which seeks new models of social form that emerge from existing non-hierarchical models of kinships and belonging.

However, in mapping the relations of the novel Hull misses how each node is not just a character, but a vector for flows of energy in the novel, which is unabashed about its ontological certainty of a mysterious spirit or force. Without social form, this energy for Velma (who has “bottled it up” inside of her) is destructive. The best illustration of this idea is the “growls” and “groans” in the novel made by Velma and her sister Palma. As Mathes has demonstrated, sound in the novel is afforded a site of potentiality; however, in order to have any effect, it must be given form. In the first chapter, Velma’s
growling comes in the response to an imagined or recollected conversation with the
politico Ruby and a response by Minnie Ransom:

And she wanted to answer Ruby, wanted to say something intelligible and
calm and hip and funny so the worked could take precedence again. But the words
got caught up in the grind of her back teeth as she shred silk and canvas and paper
and hair. The rip and shriek of silk prying her teeth apart. And it all came out a
growling.

....

“Growl all you want, sweetheart. I haven’t heard a growl like that since
Venus moved between the sun and the earth, mmm, not since the coming of the
Lord of the Flames. Yes, sweetheart, I haven’t heard a good ole deep kneebend
from-the-source growl such as that in some nineteen million years. Growl on...”
(41)

As much as the growl is from Velma’s mouth, it is also a sound that represents a
cosmologically significant force. This force emanates from the “deep time” of the past,
but it gets “caught up” in Velma’s mouth. Velma cannot shape this force into
intelligibility and it is the inability to name this force that is destroying Velma. This
inability is both a lack of available language to articulate such a feeling and Velma’s own
inability to engage with the already available social discourses that exist around her
(namely the spiritual ones) that can help her articulate this “growl” as something more
useable: “Velma’s growling a groan now swirling around the concentric circles in the
roof of her mouth in search of a seam” (102). Here the groan is locked in concentric
circles, within Velma’s own body; it is trapped, it cannot find a way out, yet searches for
a seam, a way to articulate itself in something other than a growl. Bambara suggests it
can only come out through a process of articulation between the individual and the social
world.138

138 As Avery Gordon argues, community in Bambara’s work has three functions. First the
community must be present because “you can’t do it alone; it’s too difficult” as we see with
articulating the growl. Secondly, it is necessary for healing and as a source for teaching and
During the climactic thunderstorm of the novel which coincides with revelations for many of the characters of the novel in various ways, Velma’s sister Palma also makes a similar sound while finding shelter in the rain with her boyfriend Marcus:

And still the lightening had not finished, was still blinking, stuttering, as though it meant to stay on forever once it took hold. And they would have occasion soon, and then way into the future too, to decode the look that passed between them the moment Marcus lifted his eyes and his mouth fell open and Palma dropped her eyes from the sky and moaned. (284-85)

The moan here comes as a response to a larger chaotic event in the novel, the storm, the meaning of which is debated by several characters in the novel. The difference here between Velma’s growl/groan and Palma’s moan (notice the slant rhyming) is that while both are chaotic and confusing, the fact that there is another there to share in this puncture of something powerful into everyday experience gives the experience form. They have the “occasion” to decode this look that passed between them, a chaotic element of experience which confuses them, and yet they can “decode it” and can do so “way into the future” (285). While they will most likely never reach any certainty on exactly what has just happened–what is the meaning of the look between them, Marcus’s mouth falling open, Palma’s moan?–because their experience is one that is shared, they can articulate it (“decode” it) in a way that Velma cannot. One cannot develop a language of one’s own; language is necessarily a communal/social act that allows us a finer degree of articulation of the nameless and formless.

The force that can never be wholly articulated in the novel by individuals alone can be articulated in the socially available languages and their modifications. New

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tradition. Finally, “the community must be present because without it, you’ve got no place to go when you’re better” (204). By this, Gordon means that one has a responsibility toward the community.
articulations are not useful or intelligible unless they can engage with the social
discourses of the world. At the same time these new articulations cannot completely
adopt the dominant or normative terms of social discourse; they must reframe and rework
them in socially intelligible ways. Part of Velma’s problem is her inability to articulate
the chaotic nature of the energy within her:

Crackpot. Someone a few days ago had actually called Velma a crackpot. How
fitting, though when [Obie, Velma’s husband] thought about it. Something was
definitely percolating with a fury, bubbling up and running over the sides. (100)

Here we see an overflow, a surplus, a waste that emanates from an inability to guide and
control, to give name to the nameless and formless. Without naming this force, it
overflows in dangerous and self-destructive ways. This unnamable vitalistic force is a
one of chaos confusion and danger; it is a force of social disruption, which is why it must
also be a force that is articulated in a way that ensures its usefulness as a progressive
political strategy.

Following Fred Moten, Mathes argues that the chaotic social rupturing aspect of
sound is a force of possibility and liberation within black formal experimentation.139 In
Moten’s concept, sound is distinct from speech, it is a place where “words don’t go
there”; in sound we can imagine “something impossible to locate” (69). Furthermore,
Moten argues that the political character of sound exists in its “nonlocatability” and

139 Moten argues “Words don’t go there: this implies a difference between words and sounds; it
suggests words are somehow constrained by their implicit reduction to the meaning they carry–
meanings inadequate to or detached from the objects or states of affairs they would envelop”
(42). Following Moten, Mathes argues that Bambara’s literary experimentation with sound offers
“visions of political resistance that encourage us to linger within the contingencies of black history
and politics” (374). In Mathes’ argument, sound is a crucial force for an “inchoate conception of
radical change” that takes shape through Minnie Ransom’s healing. I would argue that this
inchoate conception of radical change is not something privileged in the novel, but it is rather a
problem to overcome. The characters must shape and understand; Bambara expresses their
desire to move away from inchoateness, not toward it.
discontinuity. However, Bambara sees the problem in a slightly different way; she
doesn’t desire cacophony and a space of undefined possibility. A place where “words
don’t go” is precisely the problem. The problem is not that the space doesn’t exist; it is
that we have few available ways to articulate its existence in humane ways. For Bambara,
the problem is in the articulation, not in the absence or presence of the formless force
(whether sound, Eros, healing or something else). What is needed is a new language for
articulating into social intelligibility the possibilities inherent in this force, because there
already are ways of framing this force that are not amenable to human freedom, equality
and flourishing. In Bambara’s mind political work is an act of naming and articulation,
not a matter of privileging the formless over the rigidly formed.

Part of the difficulty of re-organizing across difference after the theoretical
rejection of class-based distinctions (whether based on race or gender) is that if these
class-based differences are no longer available to us as a source of group identity and
solidarity, what are alternative orders of society? What are ways in which this relational
force can be articulated so as to “obliterate the corrosive system of dominance,
manipulation, exploitation”? This problem is raised in the book with the deconstruction
of the word “panic,” which both signifies chaos and confusion at the same time it
signifies cosmic attachment:

She waited for panic.

Everywhere. She was grinning, as she always grinned when she was able to dig
below the barriers organized religion erected in its push toward a bogus
civilization. “I’d welcome panic,” she said aloud, certain of it. (170)

Pan as a drawing together (all nature, everywhere) in a cosmic consciousness immanently
transcendent outside of the false barrier of the “bogus civilization.” Like Freud’s
“oceanic feeling,” it is an expression of Eros as a force of attachment existing as an ontological constant that binds everything together. Yet at the same time, it is panic, a chaotic assemblage of everything that we cannot fully contemplate. Organized religion in the “bogus civilization” is one way of articulating this panic, but even it cannot fully organize pan. The slippage of the term pan to panic, from an idea of attachment to a concept of existential anxiety, highlights that they name the same force. Velma would “welcome” panic in the sense of cosmological oneness, but cannot see beyond the other panic of chaos and confusion.

How then might we conceive of the ways we are all connected without devolving into panic and confusion? In her interview with Tate, Bambara puts her ideas of cosmological connection this way:

We blind ourselves with a lot of nonsense in our scramble away from simple realities like the fact that everything is in this same place, on this planet. We and everything here are extensions of the same consciousness, and we are co-creators of that mind, will, thought. (Lewis 59)

Bambara attributes our communal consciousness to an idea which escapes our discursive possibilities and ignores the “simple reality” of attachment and interdependence. It is constant and static at the same time—a product of our co-creation that speaks to the fact of our connection at the same time it is dynamic enough to be shaped by our individual minds. But as co-creators, this consciousness is more than the sum of its parts in that there is a deeper truth that remains intact. While we can change this consciousness, we can never escape the fact that we are all co-creators of this consciousness which necessarily binds us to each other, past and present. For Bambara, this “same consciousness” is distinct from the naïve concepts of spiritual oneness expressed in
elements of the counter-culture. In Bambara’s metaphor of the universal consciousness, we are all “co-creators,” producers of the common mind. Bambara does not describe an ecstatic feeling, but a communal thought process in which our commonness is produced through our mutual production.

Yet, what might this actually look like? If Bambara is so concerned with the “process” toward making “revolution irresistible” how might we conceive of such a thing that allows for infinite complexity? We come back to the same problem in a dialectic of cosmic oneness and infinite complexity. If we conceive of liberation as breaking through societal order to progress to this ontological certainty of flow, this flow is often inaccessible to us due to the poverty of our discourse. Is there anything between or outside of these two polarities? Eve Sedgwick points out that this polarity merely places an ontological “essence” to some pre-discursive “undifferentiated place” which ultimately produces the dualistic on/off idea of chaos/order and liberation/restraint. In short, we have a stunning inability to think of the world in terms other than the binary or the infinite. Sedgwick wants to redirect our critical sensibilities to entities which highlight “finitely many” values (more than two, less than infinity). Bambara and Sedgwick find themselves at similar places in the difficulty to articulate alternative understandings of the social world in a way that neither reproduces the thought methods of domination nor devolves into unhelpful complexity.

However, a crucial difference between Bambara and Sedgwick is that Bambara wishes to keep this deep historical essence as a transhistorical feeling of oneness. For Bambara, such a power or force is crucial to access the power and truths of the past; within this force is the drive both for freedom and commitment. It is the source of power,
a “growl” over nineteen-million years (“the whole in time”) that extends infinitely forward and backward and is articulated differently according to different historical contingencies. Bambara uses the word “framework” for the articulations of this power, which guide our descriptions of how we are connected to each other and the larger world around us. Difference then for Bambara resides in the diversity of our articulations of this power; nevertheless, we are guided by a universalist sense of attachment that is a fundamental reminder of our “common consciousness” that is a product of our accumulated past. It is not merely a theoretical construct for Bambara, but a transcendence within the immanent world that we can actually experience (as many characters in the novel do). As Sophie Haywood notes, “We are all clairvoyant if we’d only know it” (43). If sexuality is one way to access this power, Bambara tells us that it is not the only one, and in fact may be one that is extremely impoverished. The fact that the access to this power is articulated in sexuality and organized religion shows us the poverty of available language to name this force.

At the same time, it is important for Bambara that we see how the articulation and production of this force has changed throughout time. We know this force is timeless and universal according to Bambara because it wasn’t always like this; we didn’t always confine our relationship to the power of our mutual connection to individual sexuality and organized religion. Western ways of seeing are a particular outlook on this force out of several known and imagined historical alternatives. Like Marcuse, Bambara insists that she is not a “utopian” writer in that she does not want to propose a radical break with history. Utopians don’t “look at this new society as part of a historical continuum”

140 It is unclear why Minnie Ransom chooses “nineteen-million years” to represent “the whole in time.” The universe is of course much older than that. Most likely the number does not have a significance other than that it describes a cosmic time scale.
(Lewis 44). Bambara wants us to see a historical continuum, a historical continuity of spirit which doesn’t change though its articulation does: “I’m also future oriented but it has to do with memory. It has to do with what is possible because it already happened or people need not be corrupted and perverted because I know in the past they were not. My glance is both a back glance as well as a flash forward” (Lewis 36). Bambara gives us an explanation of historical materialism by looking for alternatives and inspirations in a concept of historical time in which Western society is only one (relatively brief) set of articulations of this force. In an interview with Kalamu ya Salaam, “Searching for the Mother Tongue” she explains “There was something before colonialism and there is something that persists in spite of it. It’s that core that interests me. Colonialism is just a moment in our history. It’s a very temporary thing” (Holmes 64). In some ways, Bambara is close to the Black Aesthetic rewriting of the myth of white dominance. But Bambara is less interested in reconstructing a narrative of the past than in using the past as a reminder that things can be different because they have been different. Like Marcuse’s search for an imaginary lost time, Bambara believes we can find models and inspiration to guide us in the future for ways of thinking about this force that may be less exploitative than Western society’s fixation on “power.” She also departs from the Black Aesthetic reconstruction of historical myth in that she sees blackness as one of several “vantage points,” although perhaps a crucial one because it offers different conceptions of this force than dominant white narratives.141 In highlighting the “temporary” nature of colonialism, Bambara does not mean to minimize the horrors of Western domination by

141 In the interview with Salaam, Bambara writes, “I think there have been a lot of things going on in the Black experience for which there are no terms, certainly not in English, at the moment. There are a lot of aspects of consciousness for which there is no vocabulary, no structure in the English language which would allow people to validate that experience through language” (Holmes 58).
pointing out its relatively brief time scale. Rather she wants to show what a horrific aberration Western domination has been; it is neither inevitable nor timeless. But what is inevitable and timeless is a force which reveals pleasure in our deep attachment, a force Western society has perverted as power through its articulations.

While Bambara’s frameworks are presentist and pragmatic, they also posits a historical, timeless, collective consciousness. A good metaphor for this idea in the novel is “Old Tree,” a tree planted by freed slaves in 1871 and used as a kind of totem between the spiritual and mundane world for the townspeople. The tree was nourished with “mulch and compost and hope”; it was nurtured further by the loa which lived in it and would be called up during “extracting ceremonies” till they “buzzed in the bark, permanent residents” (145). The tree is a constant, discrete entity, but on closer examination is made up of staggering complexity and relationships. The building next to it burned down, but the tree continued and grew as the “collective mind” of the community grew. In a lengthy description, it is described:

The leaves, like facts, like truths, unfolding slowly...flowers promising the perfect fruit of communal action...The roots surfacing for a look around, earth-hugging networks...attended each generation by a certain few drawn to the tree, or drawn to the building, called to their vocation and their roots...waiting for the moment of eye to eye encounter and embrace, weary and impatient with amnesia, neglect and a bad press. (146)

The tree is a symbol of historical continuity and spiritual power, but it is not constant nor static. The changing group of people interacting with the tree creates an interplay and exchange of spiritual energy given to the tree and extracted from it, changing both the tree and the people around it. Though there is consistency to the spiritual power of the

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142 In Alice Walker’s *Meridian*, *The Soujourner*, a tree planted by a slave on Saxon plantation (later, Saxon College) serves a similar communal-historical function as does Old Tree.
tree, the articulations of this power change across time. “Called upon so seldom” in the present, the spirits of the tree “were beginning to believe their calling in life was to keep a lover from straying, make a neighbor’s hair fall out in fistfuls, swat horses into a run just so and guarantee the number for the day. They were weary with so little to perform” (146). In the present the use of this force is relatively ignored and its social articulation relegates it to minor matters of life rather than a central symbol of communal attachment.

It is vital for Velma and the community around her, and for radical politics more generally, to get in touch with this “core” the best of our collective history which has been obscured by “Western ways of seeing,” blinding our abilities to recognize such entities as Old Tree as a source of spiritual intelligence (Holmes 20). As she notes in her interview with Salaam, the very structure of the English language to describe direct experience has been “systematically stripped of the kinds of structures and kinds of vocabularies that allow people to plug into different kinds of intelligences” (Holmes 20). The legacy of the West has been one of destroying languages that allow us to see these intelligences and merely relegates other modes of experience to “mysteries.” Bambara conceives of the task of the writer to give name and form to these possibilities based on the available discourses of the past and the present, in touch with a transhistorical cache of our evolving common consciousness which has been limited by Western frameworks.

**Social Forms of Energy**

One can learn a lot about a culture from the discourses it uses when it talks about energy. The easy slippage from energy to power (and its synonyms, will, domination, force, etc.) underscores this point. I have argued that a sizable portion of countercultural
and radical writers and theorists conceived of energy almost exclusively in terms of Eros. However, another pervasive conception of energy in twentieth century America is that of electricity. In The Salt Eaters, Velma works at the Transchemical nuclear power plant on the outskirts of Claybourne. The Transchemical model of power dispersal is profoundly inequitable. Unlike the mutual exchanges afforded between the community and Old Tree, the power plant in the novel has profound control over the townspeople and is described as leeching their energy from them. As a character “The Hermit” tells it: “Their worldwide program, their destiny...is to drain the juices and put out the lights” (121). Transchemical exploits the energies of the townspeople through labor at the same time that it pollutes the town and manufactures black outs when threatened with a public demonstration against it. The power is abstracted from the human and natural world and controlled by a central entity with little accountability to the community, a profoundly non-reciprocal relationship. It is vital then to seek other, more equitable forms of energy distribution. Bambara reminds us that our way of articulating the flow of power structures our way of thinking about all social relationships. In the text, Sophie Haywood remarks: “Here we are in the last quarter and how we gonna pull it all together and claim

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143 Recent arguments from Patricia Yaeger and Imre Szeman in a PMLA “Editor’s Column: Literature in the Ages of Wood, Tallow, Coal, Whale Oil, Gasoline, Atomic Power, and Other Energy Sources” argues for attention to the historicity of metaphors of energy within literature. Similar to other concepts (such as Eros) energy is a metaphor that both reflects material changes and is reworked in literature to emphasize social form and relationality.

144 Bambara’s novel is one among two other contemporary narratives of female protagonists taking on nuclear power plants like the 1979 film The China Syndrome and the 1983 film Silkwood. David Mitchell’s novel Cloud Atlas (2004), also contains a mystery novel starring an intrepid black female reporter taking on a nuclear plant in the late 1970s, perhaps referencing Bambara’s novel. However, the most notorious fictional nuclear power plant in American culture is The Simpsons’ Springfield’s nuclear power plant run by Mr. Burns, who often threatens to shut off power to the town. In a 1993 episode, “Last Exit to Springfield” where the employees of the plant go on strike, Lisa Simpson sings, “So we’ll march day and night by the big cooling tower/ They have the plant but we have the power.” Lisa’s song underscores the extent to which battles over nuclear power opposed corporate electricity with “people power” in the late twentieth century.
the new age in our name?” (46). If the act of naming this force and articulating its flow is the act of politics, how might the “new age” conceive of power in a less exploitative way?

Like Minnie Ransom’s appropriation and negotiation of existing formal patterns of relationality, the novel highlights other metaphorical patterns with potentials to provide workable social frameworks. Echoing the “perennial philosophy” of the universality of the world’s religious traditions from the more mystical sexual revolutionary theorists (Aldous Huxley, Gerald Heard, Norman O. Brown), Campbell a writer/waiter in the novel, in a moment of inspiration discovers that multiple systems of thought are ways to give shape to the same formless and nameless force:

[He] knew in that glowing moment that all the systems were the same at base—voodoo, thermodynamics, I Ching, astrology, numerology, alchemy, metaphysics, everybody’s ancient myths—they were the same, to the extent that their origins survived detractors and perverters. How simple universal knowledge is after all, he grinned. (21)

We are given no indication in the novel to doubt Campbell’s insight, as mystical as it is. And his insight prompts him to begin an articulation of his own, aside from the ones he lists that have mostly been discredited. He does not necessarily mean that they are the same system, but they are all similar ways of understanding a formless and nameless aspect of experience, what the novel thinks of as the spiritual.

While scientific knowledge is a touchy subject in the novel (and in feminist and critical theory more generally) scientific metaphors offer several compelling ways of thinking about the complexity of relationality. After all as demonstrated extensively in

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145 Campbell’s name is perhaps a reference to the anthropologist Joseph Campbell and his idea of the “monomyth.” In his 1949 book *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* Campbell argues that myths from multiple traditions share fundamental structures. I thank Marianne DeKoven for pointing out this allusion.
Pynchon’s *Gravity’s Rainbow*, technological ways of thinking are already endemic to our ways of thinking about experience, though they need not be the only ways. If we are the “feminist investigators” that Spillers prompts us to be, we can find non-hierarchical and non-binary arrangements within the framework of scientific thought that might allow us to find patterns of attachment through social complexity. As Donna Haraway’s “A Manifesto for Cyborgs” argues, technological and scientific patterns of relationality might reveal models that maintain harmony between the individual entities and the plural arrangements. Such patterns might get us closer to understanding Bambara’s revolutionary goal of “a free society of whole individuals.” Campbell finds such a possibility in physics. Observing a group of engineers from Transchemical playing with the objects on his table:

> The game of putting together various fissionable elements, fuels, propellants, outlining processes, conditions, possible containers, that Campbell could actually see the unbonded atoms on the table, so many colored balls on the green tablecloth like after the opening break, various colored balls settling into position waiting for the cue, waiting for the next shot to overcome inertia and go banging, bouncing, colliding all over the table. (213)

Ultimately, the particular construction of atoms on the table turns out to be dangerous, but the attention to the relationship between different relatively autonomous entities able to bind in multiple different ways provides a potential language that describe a structure of energy in a way that gives form to a complex phenomenon. As critics Margot Ann Kelley and Janelle Collins point out, the discourse of atomic and theoretical physics, along with systems theory, provides a compelling way of organizing the social networks of the novel, much in the way that Hull’s maps details these relationships. The forms of units in the idea of nuclear “fission” in Collins’ reading and the use of systems theory in
Kelley’s reading allow us read the novel as providing multiple ways of rethinking “the relation between order and disorder, chaos and complexity” (481). If as Kelley points out the novel seeks new ontologies to suggest “viable rescriptions of old arrangements,” then Bambara finds that we must look for these new ways of articulating within all available knowledge. As Kelley notes, “these new patterns for knowing translates into new patterns for being” (487). While other forms of knowing within black folk culture may be more amenable to a free and just social order, we cannot ignore the ways in which scientific thinking structures our ways of knowing in the present.

The network is also a technological way of seeing that is a powerful metaphor for connection. When Transchemical has a problem with the erasure of employee health records, Velma is taken in for questioning. Jan believes that Jamahl, Velma’s lover, has erased the records through dialing into the computer system, effectively opening a closed network to outside intrusion. Haraway has noted the feminist possibilities in the networked world, citing Bambara’s text as an example. For Haraway, “networking” is both “a feminist practice and a multinational corporate strategy–weaving is for oppositional cyborgs” (136). Haraway reminds us that these forms are new but already existing methods for demonstrating viable ways to conceive of social orders. Our task is to learn to read these “webs of power and social life” so that we may learn “new couplings, new coalitions” (136). In Haraway’s argument, thinking about relationality as a network suggests both a profusion of spaces and identities but also the “permeability of boundaries in the personal body and the body politic” that we see in Jamahl’s subversion.

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146 This of course is similar to Pynchon’s concerns with technology and science in Gravity’s Rainbow. However, a crucial difference for Bambara is that these metaphors are ways of describing possible social worlds, whereas for Pynchon they often operate as individual lenses on experience (e.g. Byron the Bulb).
Network thinking maintains both difference and identity, separation and relation simultaneously—a model for a free society of whole individuals. However, with Jamahl’s intrusion into this system, we can see how this network is not self-contained and can be appropriated and modified in an attempt to change its very structure. Bambara allows us to see how by reading patterns in the world around us, we can modify and subvert those patterns toward different aims.

In Bambara’s mind though, the political problem is not only a matter of access to power; it is primarily a problem of naming the flows of power. There is a often a slippage between the social assemblage and the name we give to it; the two do not correlate exactly to each other. For example in the novel, characters wonder what the Brotherhood plans to do for the Spring Festival:

Only the Brotherhood—the sons, grandsons and nephews of what years ago had been the Mardi Gras Society before the gangs then drugs busted up the network—knew what skit would be performed as the main event of the festival. The most anybody else could find out was the general look of the costumes of at least the colors of the various ‘families’ or ‘tribes’ or ‘gangs’ or ‘clubs.’ (127-28)

Here we see a crisis in naming relationality. The Brotherhood is now made up of the non-brotherly attachments of sons, grandsons and nephews, complicating the simple horizontal structure of brotherhood. Formerly a Society, it has been broken up by both a new force of attachment (gangs) and presumably antisocial forces of drug addiction. At present “they” can only be identified by color; the four different words used to describe them get close to describing what the assemblage actually is, but the concepts do not quite correspond to the actual assemblage of individuals. Color seems to be the only way to name this assemblage. Bambara both emphasizes the superfluity of words we have to describe human relationships as well as the fact that we need all of them to describe the
bunch because none of these terms quite matches our sense of what they are as a “they.” The fact that this irreducible difference (like Derrida’s difféance) between actuality and concept exists means we need multiple frameworks to name social groupings.

The novel, of course, rejects social formations based on hierarchy, namely the couple form and political organizations that subordinate the autonomy of individuals to group identity (the basis of much of Bambara’s critique of sixties movements). The two methods the novel promotes the most are the concentric circles of the Masters Mind, the group of healers in the Southeast Community Infirmary and the Seven Sisters. As many critics point out, the Seven Sisters, named after a constellation (and resonating with the group of women’s colleges) is a promising grouping in the novel that organizes relatively independent entities into a pattern. The group is a multi-ethnic group of women embodying Lorde’s notion of the “creative function of difference” (“Age” 116). The Seven Sisters travel and perform collectively written plays while conceiving of their bond as that of sisters, but from different traditions—each sister has both her given name and her membership name named after crops from her ethnic tradition (e.g. yam, rice, corn, etc.). While each maintains her own autonomy, the group remains constant (the unchanging “core” that Bambara is interested in) because each member chooses her own successor. As Kelley notes, “Their collective suggests an alternative to the nuclear family and to obligatory heterosexuality, one which avoids the risk of domination due to age or gender” (487). So too, I would add that the members maintain their particularity and autonomy, both through their deep cultural lineage of their ancestors, but also through

147 See particularly Hull, Kelley and Collins. Susan Willis finds other metaphors for society in the infirmary, the bus, and the sidewalk cafe. These are not “community,” so much as entities that might one day become community. For Willis, community does not “come together” in the novel and the novel expresses its lack. However, these forms are nascent possibilities for the emergence of new forms of community.
their membership in other overlapping social circles (like Palma) of relationality. However, it is only the human social relationships which are described in the criticism of the text. Bambara (like Haraway) offers an understanding of relationality in these groups that moves beyond human intellect. Specifically, while the Seven Sisters are known by the crops from their respective traditions, they are far removed from the land, and besides these are *cultivated* crops which require humans for their growth. Bambara ultimately wants to incorporate the earth within our system of relationality, or at least find methods within our relationships with nature that could provide new ways knowing and new ways of interacting with the natural world. Indeed, one of the hallmarks of Western culture for Bambara is that it is a way of seeing that ignores or devalues the “different kinds of intelligences” available to us in the natural world. While Bambara’s text, existing in the midst of 1970s anti-nuclear campaigns, is concerned about environmental destruction, her interest in non-human patterns of relationality is not out of strict ecological concern. Rather, Bambara is drawn to the natural world to find new ways of seeing that have been eclipsed by Western modes of perception.

In a passage unconnected to any specific individual voice, the novel presents an ethic of “ecology of the self” in which the transformation of the self, like Lorde’s Eros, would radiate outwards to the “the tribe, the species, the earth” (247). Such an ecology would be built on a “new spiritualism” made up of “the simplicity of the karmic law—cause and effect” (248). This idea of a “karmic law” of cause and effect, a recognition of the interdependence of all earthly things, may seem naïve or overly simplistic. Yet for Bambara our Western frameworks consistently blind us from “simple realities” like the fundamental interconnection of all living things on the planet. In Bambara’s ecology,
cause and effect points to an ideal balance and harmony of particular entities organized around a logic of cause and effect. Bambara describes a self-regulating system, but at the same time privileges an ethic whereby individuals must act in harmony with this system by recognizing and enacting this “karmic law.”

The inability to recognize this law has dire ecological and social consequences in the novel. The Seven Sisters contemplate the inability to recognize this seemingly simple karmic law. In the following passage, they contemplate *together*, a formal instantiation of the attachment between its members, about a recent campaign:

And they were all quiet, contemplating the distance traveled-rain. Years ago rain meant splashing in puddles, mud pies, rain barrels, watering the stock, the crops, rain for shampoos. At the very worst, rain had meant colds. And then the lens widened to incorporate mud slides and floods. Now that contaminated soil has provoked the local folk of Barnwell to join with hundreds of safe-earth activists was utmost in their minds, each rain meant contamination leaching inches ever closer to the water table, spelling the ruin of the Savannah River and all who lived in it, on it, by it, from it. (225)

The river becomes a way of organizing here: “in it, on it, by it, from it” describes a complex web of relationships that demonstrates a cause and effect between the land and the community. Yet in ignoring the cause and effect here, the river gets cut off from the cycle of cause and effect within the people. It is the failure to recognize the simple karmic law of cause and effect that creates the perverse effects for the people who depend on the river.

But nature is not only a model for new ways of seeing and organizing the social world. As Old Tree shows, it is also a source of knowledge of the core of the timeless, historical consciousness. The natural world in the novel is where we are most in contact with and most able to articulate this power: “‘We’re into nature,’ not hiding out in
Wordsworth or Kerouac, excusing the self from social action, but running to the woods in hopes of an audience with the spirits long withdrawn from farms and gardens all withered and wasted...” (247). What Bambara hopes is that within the natural world we may find models for relationality that allow us to remember the deep spiritual connection we share. Such a recognition of a deep connection and relationality for Bambara is crucial to political change that seeks to bring about an end to exploitation. Our plans for political change must be based on some belief that extends beyond the historical contingencies of the moment, much in the way Old Tree does. At the same time, as the metaphor of Old Tree shows, the mutual production, the give and take between the tree and the people, has a historicity all its own. Old Tree is not a symbol of pure nature—it is not Wordsworth daffodils or Kerouac’s edenic forests of Big Sur—but rather a certain articulation of nature which is produced in the interaction of the community with the tree. In this sense, it is a meeting place of multiple intelligences from the human and non-human world that emphasizes the common consciousness continually being recreated in the present.

Encounters with nature reveal both an underlying order and consistency at the same time it opens up a world of complex relationships and difference. For example, the marsh which acts as a “site of metamorphosis” for Velma is a place of healing and power where Velma has the vision about “panic” discussed above (171). During her healing session, she imagines herself in the marsh that she once ran away to as a child:

Things were active around her. What she’d thought was lichen coating the tree trunk with mottled green and white, or what she thought were fungus ledges that grew straight out from the bark in beige shelves were colonies of bugs moving very fast. And for a moment, she thought she felt the headphone clamped on, sounds surround her and a pulling down. It occurred to her that if they slowed down, they would look, at a glance, like what they were—bugs. And if they speeded up, they’d be not visible bugs looking like lichen, but the idea of bugs
resonating in her brain. Time. Time not speeding up but opening up to take her inside. (171)

In seeing herself as part of a deep time, Velma now has a sense of calm she can use when “the crowding began” (171). It is a place of calm like the glass jar, but one which exists through encounters with different kinds of intelligences. In being newly attuned to the ways of the natural world through a shift in her perception, Velma is able to see how a simple phenomenon like the lichen exists at multiple different levels. It is here that Velma is able to place herself in the noise that previously existed outside the jar. In a recognition of deep time and deep connectedness, Velma has the calm and perspective needed to see the “core” as much as she is able to see how her perception of it depends on her framework for perception. Nature itself is a source of changing infinite patterns, but also provides patterns that are workable, that can be reduced to the simple karmic law of cause and effect.

This spiritual sense is denigrated by Ruby as just some “pagan spring celebration shit,” a “scattered, fragmented, uncoordinated mess” (201). And Bambara would maintain that it often is represented as some “scattered, fragmented, uncoordinated mess” and that is precisely the point; it refers to some type of core that exists, but which we can only access through the available articulations we have, which do not necessarily need to be scattered, fragmented and uncoordinated, because they were not always so. This does not mean that we should resurrect old ways of seeing, but rather that we must seek out the ways of seeing that do allow us to make it something other than an fragmented mess, because to leave it as that as Ruby does is to allow it to be named by others.
The novel then is an attempt to take a fragmented mess and shape it into sense. Starting from the premise of a crisis in social form, Bambara’s novel allows us to see the relationships that develop within a seemingly un-mappable social world. It is through the metaphor of energy circulation, a force of attachment much like Eros, that Bambara can articulate patterns whereby characters maintain their particularity and interiority as they can come together in lasting and fleeting ways. Bambara’s novel is a mythology for a culture in which traditional forms of attachment have been discredited in the name of individual liberation and destruction. But given social fragmentation and atomization, it is also the opportunity to rewrite the social world anew from an assumption of both freedom in difference and equality in identity. Bambara’s mythology then provides us a way of mapping that keeps difference and identity in perpetual dialectical tension. While we are free individuals, we are also subject to the undeniable fact of attachment. Yet it is the way that we articulate this attachment and who gets to participate in this articulation that defines what attachment is.

For Bambara, to recognize that we are co-creators of the same formless, but undeniable, consciousness is not only an ethical act, but a powerful spiritual one as well. How we express this inescapable fact has enormous ramifications for how we structure our politics and our social world. To name this force of connection and attachment—whether it be electricity, essence, energy, force, pleasure or love—is to give it form, shape and agency in the social world. Bambara’s novel reminds us that giving names to the formless and nameless can be a radically democratic social process when we all have the ability to be co-creators of our social world. While our present articulations are always inadequate to create a society of free individuals creating a social world together, we can
never shake off the powerful drive to persist in searching for the elusive form that corresponds to what we know is there.
Conclusion: What’s Funny ’Bout Peace, Love and Understanding

Seriously, love? It is difficult to hear arguments extolling love as a universal force of attachment without cynicism. Can anyone really listen to the Beatles’ “All You Need is Love” without rolling her eyes? Most of us are quite cynical about the concept even when it is clear we mean something other than that tired romantic conception of couple love. The concept of “an army of lovers,” despite its continued relevance in post-sixties America, has more than a whiff of naïve hippie utopianism. Such skepticism over love has of course blinded us to the concepts of love that were not so simple as pop songs suggest. As I have attempted to demonstrate in this dissertation, love in the mid-century becomes politicized as a mode of social attachment beyond the couple. Furthermore, the understanding of Eros as developed by the writers in my dissertation is not primarily a naïve affect or unthinking libidinal drive. Rather, love becomes a name for relations and social attachments that demonstrate plural logics of social organization; the interest in the plurality of ways of naming attachments even prompts writers like Bambara to move beyond love to find alternative logics of relationality.

Nevertheless, many of these theories of love also express a utopian ideal that we may all bind ourselves together under the banner of love. Love often describes a social form that contains all that our contemporary social order does not: freedom, equality and radical democratic participation in mutually producing our world. But as most of the writers in this dissertation point out, the banner of love can also paper over what it seeks to avoid: oppression, inequality and totalitarianism. After all, as Pynchon demonstrates the relational and affective structure of fascism is built a rhetorics of love. And as Baldwin proposes, love can easily maintain pernicious states of innocence. Furthermore,
Millet argues that rhetoric of brotherhood masks patriarchal domination and exploitation. This suspicion over love’s ability to bind us as well as blind us leads these writers to embrace a more open-ended, less deterministic understanding of love. Accordingly the love that they privilege is a process that betrays a deep suspicion of love as an affect. In their mind, love is an open-ended process of reciprocal negotiating and mutual production of the social world.

There is an ambivalence in love as a model relational form. It speaks to a desire for totalizing attachment in an erotic community, but the wayward, undetermined motions of Eros challenge the singular logic of any specific erotic community. In the words of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, love territorializes and deterritorializes, sometimes in the same act. New sexways open up, but they also fade away and are pushed out of existence. While Marxist thought has tended to emphasize the class-based logics of love, queer theory has argued in favor of desire’s antisocial character. Yet recent work in queer theory has attempted to define the convergence between Marxism and queer theory arguing that they are not as distinct as once thought. For example, Kevin Floyd has argued that both materialist and queer understandings of the social demonstrate an “aspiration toward totality,” an aspiration that is never fully complete: “Aspirations to totality approach the universal, rather, from the vantage point of a specific location within that web of relations, a vantage that necessarily abstracts that totality in coloring everything it sees, but also makes possible broad understandings of social reality unavailable to other perspectives” (12). Abstract versions of totality can never be complete because they can only emerge from specific locations that must necessarily exclude other perspectives. Following Fredric Jameson’s reading of Georg Lukács’
History and Class Consciousness, Floyd argues that Marxism and queer theory both share this aspiration toward totality that is best thought of as something that “has yet to be written” (11). Floyd’s work builds on prior work from Michael Warner, Lauren Berlant, and José Esteban Muñoz who conceive of queer social forms as always something yet to be written, emphasizing queer social process over model social forms. As Warner and Berlant put it in one of the foundational essays of queer social theory, “Sex in Public,” “The queer world is a space of entrances, exists, unsystemized lines of acquaintance, projected horizons, typifying examples, alternate routes, blockages, incommensurate geographies” (198). For Berlant and Warner, “queer world making” is by definition unrealizable as community or identity because it is dispersed through “incommensurate registers,” relations which emerge but cannot easily be mapped under a totalizing form (198). Queer world making then might be better thought of as a “promiscuous relational experimentalism,” a continued search for new ways of belonging outside of societal norms, as Lisa Duggan has put it in a recent GLQ roundtable on queer materialism (146). And yet, if this queer world is always in process, always twisting relational forms and creating new ones that cannot be solidified by the social, how might these social forms be viable politically? Countering the “antisocial thesis” from Lee Edelman which argues for a radical queerness as destructive of all social form, Floyd joins those like Muñoz, who defend the necessity of such social abstractions with aspirations toward totality to do the work of politics. This recent interest in queer materialism reveals an ambivalence over the political need for a totalizing concept of relation while still acknowledging the norms that such totalizing conceptions create and the perspectives they exclude. In post-sixties articulation of erotic solidarity and community in the trope of “an army of lovers,” we
can see this ambivalence between the necessity of totalizing social forms to counter the totalizing force of capitalism. Yet even this queer materialist interest maintains a deep suspicion of regimes like love that bind us all too tightly. In this conclusion, I assess some recent political uses of love to question its radical and progressive uses. There is something funny about love, particularly in the type of erotic communities I have charted. Love both binds us too tightly and normalizes us relationally, but it also points to how we may continually unbind ourselves from a social order and rebind ourselves to others in unforeseen ways.

Most recently, we see the ambivalence of love as a force of solidarity and a model for new social forms in the 2011 Occupy movement, particularly in its theory and strategy periodical, *Tidal*. A mix of political strategy and theory from both activists, experts and left theorists such as Judith Butler and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Tidal* has published four issues which we can read as emblematic of a larger impasse in radical politics. Occupy’s famous slogan, “We are the 99%” defines solidarity at the same time it grasps toward a totality—it is the 99%, not the 1%, who should have the power of democratic decision making. And yet it does not describe how the 99% might be constituted differently other than through the anarchic political process of Occupy itself. The 99% is merely the rest of us grappling for a new way to think of ourselves. The difficulties in expressing existing forms of relationality under capitalism are apparent in the first communiqué published in December 2011 which launches a critique of relationality under capitalism: “At Wall Street we see that the basic quantum of experience has become the transaction; that life’s central purpose is to convert all of existence into tradable currency” (3). In the communiqué the anonymous writers attack
the outsized power of Wall Street and global inequity, but they are drawn to how
capitalism creates a specific type of totalizing relationality in the logic of economic
transaction. In a capitalist regime, we cannot think of relationality as anything other than
through economic metaphors. However the second communiqué published in March
2012 emphasizes the mystification of the social:

Whatever that thing is has grown so huge and weird that we struggle even to find
a name for it—the System, the Military-Industrial Complex, the Institution, the
State, the Matrix, the Man. No one really understands what the Thing means or
intends, but pundits occasionally offer a metaphor. (4)

The aspiration toward totalizing critique, focusing on the logic of association sustaining
the 1% in the first communiqué, in the second becomes an inability to understand what
exactly is this “Thing” they are opposing. And yet there is a “Thing” which structures the
social world in vastly unequal ways. Through the process of Occupy itself, the writers
hope to discover new forms of relationality in order to build “genuine relationships with
each other” so that we may “remind ourselves that another path is possible” (Tidal #1 3).
But it is unclear what new “thing” might replace this old “thing.”

The writers throughout Tidal’s four issues grapple to describe what these
“genuine relationships” might be. Judith Butler’s contribution to Tidal #1 argues for an
alternative form of belonging other than the transactional logic of neoliberalism in her
notion of precarity. Our recognition of common precariousness and reliance on each
other, developed in Undoing Gender and Precarious Life are put into the service of
Occupy’s strategy: “As bodies, we suffer and we resist and together, in various locations,
exemplifying that form of the sustaining social bond that neo-liberal economics has
almost destroyed” (13). As such, she believes that a recognition of the fact that our
wellbeing depends on others can help foster a new conception of our common world. Yet what will this common form be? How might we understand and name it, other than the abstraction of the 99%? Within the 99% what lines of relati

As Occupy progresses through 2012, *Tidal* becomes increasingly concerned with consumer and student debt refusal. Debt is not only a financial burden, but a form of relati

Destruction destroys solidarity; it corrodes relationships and social movements with the yolk of obligation to work and consume,” an article calling for a May Day student debt strike argues (*Tidal* #2 17). Feminist-Marxist theorist Silvia Federici argues for a “commoning against debt” in *Tidal* #4 to subvert the

atomizing experience of debt into a collective refusal of repayment. Yet this commoning against debt does not itself seem powerful enough as rhetorical calling together. A

communiqué of a new campaign for debt refusal entitled “Invisible Army” published in issue #4 ends: “We are an army of lovers who cannot be defeated. We are laying the groundwork for another world” (31). In many ways the debt refusal is similar to Marcuse’s “Great Refusal” in that the refusal is not merely a negation but a negation that opens up the alternatives to new groundwork for organizing another social world.¹⁴⁸

Here, Occupy looks forward to a social form grounded in collectivities defined by love—an indebtedness to each other, not to the 1%. And yet this new metaphor of love becomes an economic one of exchange that recapitulates the structure of debt even as it renames love as a type of universal social indebtedness. While we could imagine worse social structures than those based on loving indebtedness (neoliberalism for example), I want to question how easily love can become totalized and normalized by such discourses.

Indeed, any queer critique of love as a form of solidarity must be cautious of the normalization and singularization of love—is relationality only indebtedness? Who decides?

While writers in my dissertation argue that love can be a powerful source of identification and solidarity, postmodernists such as Jameson have criticized love as type of solidarity against late capitalism because sexuality has been so tainted in the West as a realm of the self. In Jameson’s mind, sexuality masks the more fundamental capitalist modes of production that structure social experience.\(^{149}\) However, other contemporary post-Marxist theorists Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri in *Empire* and *Commonwealth* attempt to resuscitate love as a concept of left analysis. In *Commonwealth*, they write that leftist theory has failed to think love seriously but argue that it is “unwise to leave love to the priests, poets, and psychoanalysts” (179). Though many of their conclusions about love mirror Marcusean ideas, they rely on Jameson, Michel Foucault and Deleuze and Guattari for their theory of the biopolitics of “Empire.” By Empire they mean a new global form of sovereignty that maintains a logic of rule of postmodern capital in terms of Foucaultian biopolitics and Deleuzian deterritorialization in the form of privatization and dispossession. What makes Empire so sinister to Hardt and Negri is that it exists in “no-place”; like Jameson’s postmodernism, it is at once pervasive but mystified and obscured. Since Empire is nowhere recognized as Empire but through its logic of rule operates everywhere, resistance must come in the form of a “will to be against” that is also everywhere. They write in *Empire*, “We suffer exploitation, alienation, and command as enemies, but we do not know where to locate the production of oppression. And yet we

\(^{149}\) See Jameson’s essays, “Periodizing the 60s,” “Pleasure: A Political Issue” and “On the Sexual Production of Western Subjectivity” for his critique of left organizing around sexuality.
still resist and struggle” (211). Fortunately Hardt and Negri argue that a “being against” (similar to Marcuse’s “Great Refusal”) might come out of an “oblique or diagonal stance” (212). They see such forces emerging out of migration and free movement that is necessary for capitalism: “The kinds of movement of individuals, groups, and populations that we find today in Empire, however, cannot be completely subjugated to the laws of capitalist accumulation—at every moment they overflow and shatter the bounds of measure” (397). Empire then contains an internal contradiction that creates the excess out of which new ways of living and new forms of relations emerge. These excesses produces a “new nomadic horde” or a “new race of barbarians” that will invade and evacuate Empire (215). They call this force the “multitude” which can provide a counter-Empire, “a new global vision, a new way of living together” (214).

Hardt and Negri are searching not only for a way to organize the energy of the multitude but “also constituting through the desires of the multitude” a singular alternative commonness to Empire (214). As they put it, “the multitude is not formed simply by throwing people together and mixing nations and peoples indifferently; it is the singular power of a new city” (395). The multitude is not just a collection of different singularities, a sum of population, but a new common ordering of a singular threat that can provide a counter-logic of association to Empire. While alluded to in Empire, in Commonwealth, Hardt and Negri privilege love as a logics of commonality. Following a Spinozist conception of love, they argue that love is a name given to the ontological constitution of the common. Love ruptures with what exists, but also it is productive in that it creates the common out of singularities: “As a motor of association love is the power of the common in a double sense: both the power that the common exerts and the
power to constitute the common” (189). In this sense then, love is a process of common world-making whose political goals are reflected in the very production of the common world. In their mind, love binds singularities together into a political force capable not only of being a force of solidarity against Empire but also providing a model of social logic wholly different than Empire. While their concept of love attempts to provide identity across difference, it is unclear why there must be a singular unified opposition to Empire, other than the fact that their analysis (like Jameson’s) is a totalizing analysis whereby capitalist mode of production defines Empire. If Empire is everywhere, then it also must be attacked everywhere, but it does not follow there must be a singular common of love.

Since the beginning of queer social theory a diverse group of critics have understood queerness as distinct from Marxist thought’s narrow focus on mode of production and its arguments for class-based solidarity.150 In their focus on social norms, particularly heteronormativity, they have argued for a queerness that is either corrosive of the social as a form (Edelman, Leo Bersani) or an action that is aimed at constituting it differently (Warner, Berlant, Butler). As such, queer social critique since Fear of a Queer Planet has had a suspicion of totalizing social forms which are based on exclusion, identity and normalization. We might ask then how Hardt and Negri’s conception of love, as well as the sexual revolutionary understanding of love as the production of a common, might reinforce normative understandings of attachment. After all, love in its traditional sense implies all sorts of norms of couple-hood, monogamy, patriarchal heterosexuality, etc. But even in its position as a common it is easily vulnerable to normative framing. As

150 See particularly Warner, Publics and Counterpublics, Berlant, The Queen of America Goes to Washington City, and Berlant and Warner’s “Sex in Public” published in both books.
Warner writes, in Marcuse’s conception of the political fight for Eros, “the question remains open as to whose erotics will count as Eros, what context makes an erotics utopian, and how struggles over erotics can be linked to different political fights” (158). Warner emphasizes the contested discourses of Eros and demonstrates how multiple sexualities and their histories resist an “intrinsic” nature to sexuality. If love is the “production of the common” but also a model for the common, what norms might this totalizing notion of social love produce? How might this commons of love produce normative forms of relationality? Or put another way, if love is the name to which we hold in common, does this require that we all agree and act around the same understanding of love? If anything, I hope I have demonstrated in this dissertation, that love (or desire, or sex, or Eros) is subject to shifting discursive productions that reproduce their own norms. Hardt and Negri would likely point out that a regime of the common produced by love is preferable to the regime of Empire, but in their conception, the norms of Empire are replaced by a normative conception of love. Thus, whenever we are talking about love we must ask: whose idea of love are we talking about?

This question of who defines love is raised in the 1990 “Queer Nation Manifesto” produced by Queer Nation, an off shoot of ACT UP New York. In this context, the concept of an erotic community perches between a minoritarian queer discourse and a larger universalist queer discourse. Telling us “AN ARMY OF LOVERS CANNOT LOSE” the anonymous queer writers tell us:

We are an army because we have to be. We are an army because we are so powerful. (We have so much to fight for; we are the most precious of endangered species.) And we are an army of lovers because it is we who know what love is. Desire and lust, too. We invented them. We come out of the closet, face the

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151 For a history of Queer Nation, see Berlant and Freeman’s “Queer Nationality”.
rejection of society, face firing squads, just to love each other! Every time we fuck, we win. (1)

The queer army of lovers here is constituted as a minority from the outside. Yet this self-determination has been flipped in the adoption of the epithet queer, which the statement tells us is a “rough word” but also a “sly and ironic weapon we can steal from the homophobe’s hands and use against him” (5). Like the “slantwise” appropriation of queer, the statement also demonstrates a reworking of the definition of love. If love is defined by mainstream culture as fundamentally heterosexual, the writers flip this on its head and argue that it is the queers who know what real love is. Love here is not an easy feeling of attachment; that type of love masks a powerful heterosexual privilege—it normalizes love. Queer Nation’s counter-rhetoric of love is deployed as powerful radical and subversive action. Queers know what love is because they are the ones who risk everything for a chance to display love. This definition of love seeks to extend not only the sexual orientation of love but also to remove the privilege of who names love.

Nevertheless, the Queer Nation manifesto imagines a universalist conception of love by extending it to a queer force of relationality. It argues to make every street a part of “our sexual geography,” a city of “yearning and then total satisfaction,” and ultimately a country where “we” can be “safe and free and more” (1). But “we” here dissolves from a queer “we” to a universal “we” as the statement addresses its reader “And I want to be a lover to each and every one of you” (1). As Berlant and Elizabeth Freeman argue, Queer Nation’s project is coordinating a “new nationality” taking equally from the insurgent nationalism of oppressed peoples and the revolutionary idealism of American culture (148). However this nationhood is defined by multiple and ambiguous forms of
relationality that are denied or excluded in the patriotic national conception. While there is an aspiration toward totality in the manifesto, the very understanding of what constitutes love is politically contested. The statement hinges not on the presence or absence of love, nor even on who gets to love, but on the norms that constitute love and who gets to define them.

The problems of capitalism or heteronormativity cannot be reduced to a presence or absence of love. As these post-sixties articulations of erotic communities reinforce, the concept of love exists in a contested terrain subject to norms and privileges that reduce relationality to a singular logic of association. To reduce a vision of the social world to love is to normalize relationality. We need new ways of understanding our social world, new forms of thought that structure experience in finitely many ways, not merely in the singular abstraction of love, nor in the embrace of an endless array of relations the social world produces. Our political impasse is characterized by a search for other viable logics of association that have yet to be imagined, articulated and critiqued. There are multiple types of ways of producing the world together and as many ways of naming relationality as their are relations to be named and produced. It is a mistake to limit these only to love. We need much more than it.
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